MASTER AND MAID

L. ALLEN HARKER.

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BOOKS BY L. ALLEN HARKER

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BY

MRS. L. ALLEN HARKER

AUTHOR OF "MISS ESPERANCE AND MR. WYCHERLY," "A ROMANCE OF THE NURSERY," "HIS FIRST LEAVE," "CONCERNING PAUL AND FIAMETTA," ETC.

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TO

A. W. A. H.

"The dearest friend to me, the kindest man,
The best condition'd and unwearied spirit
In doing courtesies."

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MASTER AND MAID

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CHAPTER I

ON the second Friday of term Anthony Bevan, whom all his world called "Bruiser Bevan," Housemaster of "B. House" in Hamchester College, sat at dessert with three of his prefects. They had exhaustively discussed the prospects of the coming football season, had mutually exchanged their holiday experiences, and now, when it was really time that the boys should betake themselves to their several studies, they still lingered enjoying the last few pleasant moments over the walnuts and the very light port that their housemaster considered suited to their young digestions.

The big window at the end of the room stood open to the soft September evening,

and the sudden crunch of wheels upon the newly gravelled drive was plainly audible, followed as it was by a loud ring.

Master and boys fell silent, listening; and the parlour-maid opened the dining-room door.

"Please, sir, there's a young lady—" she began; when the tale was taken up by another voice, a young voice, singularly full and pleasant:

"It's me, Tony, dear; and didn't you expect me? Dad promised faithfully he would telegraph, but I suppose he forgot, as usual; and oh, I'm so tired! We had a good crossing, but I couldn't sleep, it was so stuffy."

Val, the Irish terrier, who always lay under his master's chair, rushed at the newcomer, leaping upon her in rapturous and excited welcome.

"Ah! 'tis the dear dog is pleased to see me. Down, Val, down! You'll tear me to bits! Dear Val! but your welcome is too warm altogether."

Into the circle of light thrown by the hanging lamp above the table came a girl—a remarkably upright, small, slim girl of nineteen

—clad in a long light grey travelling coat, with a voluminous grey gauze veil thrown back from her hat. Her little face was delicately featured and pale. She was not particularly noticeable until she spoke: then the *timbre* of her voice was arresting, it was so full and sweet—not in the least degree loud, but singularly clear and musical, with the unmistakable lilt of a Southern Irish brogue.

Tony Bevan leapt to his feet and advanced to meet her, holding out both his hands.

"*You,* Lallie! now! Why, I didn't expect you for another fortnight. Your father's letter only——"

"Well, I'm here, Tony," she interrupted, "sure enough, and I'm ravenous. Can't I sit down with you and these gentlemen and have some dinner now—at once? I'm fairly clean, for I had ever such a wash at Birmingham."

The girl included the three prefects who stood around the table in her remarks, smiling radiantly upon the assembled company, and one of them hastily set his chair for her near the head of the table which was Tony's place.

As she sat down she flashed another entrancing smile in the direction of the prefect exclaiming:

"Bring another chair now and sit down by me, and don't on any account let me spoil your dinners. Just take it that I'm a few courses late, and you'll all be kind and keep me company. Have some more nuts now, do, and then I'll feel more at home."

With the best will in the world those three prefects sat down again, and each one hastily helped himself to nuts, in spite of the fact that their host, far from seconding the newcomer's invitation, turned right round in his chair to look at the clock.

The concentrated and admiring gaze of three pairs of eyes did not in the smallest degree disconcert her. She was manifestly and perfectly at her ease. Not so her host; he looked distinctly worried and perturbed, though he hastened to ring the bell and order some dinner for his evidently unexpected guest. Then he sat down and poured her out a glass of claret.

"Child, have you come straight from Kerry?" he asked.

"I left home yesterday afternoon and crossed at night, and I seem to have been travelling ever since."

"By yourself?" Tony asked anxiously.

"The Beamishes met me at Chester, and I had a bath and luncheon at their house, and afterwards we drove round the city. Oh! here's my dinner, and it's thankful I am to see it. How nice of you not to have eaten all the duck!"

Again she included all the company in her charming smile, and the senior prefect helped himself anew to nuts.

"You're very quiet, Tony," she said, turning to her host; "not a patch upon Val in your welcome. Am I in the way? Is there not a bed for me? If so, you must take me to some kind of a lodging after dinner. Dad forbade me to go to any sort of an hotel."

"Of course, of course," Tony exclaimed hastily, "it will be quite all right, only it is unfortunate that Miss Foster should happen to be away this week, just when you have come."

"For my part," she said, catching her opposite neighbour's eye and making a little face,

"I think that I will manage to exist without Miss Foster quite nicely till her return. Don't you worry about me, Tony. I feel quite at home already. I know you, Mr. Berry," and she nodded at the senior prefect. "Paddy's got your portrait, and you come in lots of groups. Don't you think, Tony, you ought to present these other gentlemen to me?"

Mechanically Tony Bevan made the required introductions. Whereupon the stranger added:

"I'm Paddy Clonmell's twin sister, you know; he was here last term, but he's gone to Sandhurst now. You'll remember him quite well, don't you?"

"*Rather!*" came in vigorous chorus from the three, and for the moment Tony Bevan's anxious expression changed to one of amusement.

The clock on the mantelpiece struck half-past eight.

"I think you fellows will need to go," said Tony; "Miss Clonmell will excuse you; it's more than time you were doing your prep."

"Ah, well, we'll meet again to-morrow," Miss Clonmell announced cheerfully. "There's

ever so many of you I want to see. I know lots of you by name as well as can be."

As the door was shut behind the last of the prefects the girl drew her chair nearer to Tony's and laid a small deprecating hand upon his arm.

"I'm afraid I'm fearfully in the way, Tony," she said, in a voice that subtly combined excuse, apology, and reproach. "You don't seem a bit glad to see me; and if you won't let me stay here, Dad says I'd better go to the big girls' school in this town as a by-something or other, and I'll hate it!"

"My dear," and as he spoke Tony patted the pleading little hand that lay so lightly on his arm, "*I* am entirely delighted to see you, but as I said before, it is unfortunate that Miss Foster should happen to be away."

"Bother Miss Foster! I'm certain from all I've heard that she's the very worst sort of Aunt Emileen. I'm glad she's away; I'd far rather be here with you. Paddy says she's a regular catamaran. Honestly, Tony, now, isn't she?"

Tony pursed up his lips, and tried hard to look severe as he shook his head.

"I wish she were here just at present, anyhow. When irresponsible children turn up unexpectedly, it needs some one strict to look after them."

"Please, Tony, do you mind if I take off my hat? I didn't like to do it before those boys, for I haven't a notion what state my hair is in, but you've seen me at all times ever since I was a baby, haven't you? And you'll excuse it."

She drew the big jade pins out of her hat and laid it on the senior prefect's chair. Without it, she looked absurdly young: her face was the face of a child, full of soft curves and sweet, blurred outlines. There was something timid and beseeching in the dark eyes she raised to Tony Bevan so confidingly: eyes black-lashed, with faint blue shadows underneath—the "mark of the dirty finger" that every pretty Irishwoman is proud to possess.

"You can look after me beautifully yourself, Tony, dear; that's why I've come. Dad said I'd be safer with you than any one."

"But, my child, I am in College the greater part of the day. Every minute of my time is

filled up in school and out. As it is, I have an appointment with the Chairman of the Playground Committee in five minutes. What *will* you do with yourself?"

"Can't I see the chairman too? Well then, where's Paunch? Couldn't he come and talk to me for a little bit—just while you settle with this other man?"

"Hush! You must not call Mr. Johns by that nickname here. Besides, he's taking prep., and would be impossible in any case."

"Now, Tony, don't you be hushing me for saying 'Paunch.' Everybody calls him Paunch. I've heard you do it yourself."

"Yes, Lallie, I dare say you have, but not here. It would be most disrespectful and rude——"

"Good gracious, Tony! You don't imagine I'm going to call the man Paunch to his face, do you? Did you think that when he was introduced to me I'd make him a curtsey like this"—here she arose and swept a magnificent curtsey—"and say, 'I'm delighted to make your acquaintance Mr. Paunch; I've heard a vast deal about you one way and another'?

Don't be a goose, Tony! What about Matron? *She* hasn't left, has she? Paddy says she's a regular brick, and anyway it won't be a bit duller for me here than it was with Aunt Emileen whenever Dad was away."

"Child, who is Aunt Emileen? I don't seem to have heard of her before. Couldn't she come and be with you for the next few days?"

The girl burst into sudden laughter—infectious, musical, Irish laughter. She rocked to and fro in her mirth, and suddenly snuggling up to Tony Bevan, rubbed her head against his shoulder.

"Oh, Tony, you are too delicious! She can certainly come if you want her, but I'm not sure that you'd think her much good."

"Sit up, Lallie, there's some one coming down the drive. You haven't answered my question. Who and where is Aunt Emileen?"

"Aunt Emileen is my chaperon, but she suffers from delicate health. When Dad took a little house at Fairham last November—and a nice soft winter it was—he told everybody about Aunt Emileen, so that no one should come pestering him and suggesting some nice

widow lady to keep house and take care of me. And she answered very well indeed, though it was a little difficult when the clergyman wanted to call and see her." Again she lapsed into that absurd infectious laughter.

"But whose aunt is she?" persisted the bewildered Tony. "I know your father hasn't any sisters, and your dear mother was an only girl. Is she the wife of one of your uncles? Or is she your father's aunt?"

"Honestly, Tony, I can't tell you any more about the lady except that she's Aunt Emileen."

"But what's her surname?"

"I can't tell you, Tony, for I don't know; we never bothered about a surname."

"Now, that's ridiculous, Lallie; the servants couldn't call her Aunt Emileen."

"Oh, Tony, you'll kill me, you're so funny. Listen, and I'll tell you all about it. Aunt Emileen is—a creation, a figment of Dad's brain, a sop thrown to conventionality by the most unconventional man in creation: a Mrs. Harris. She could be as strict and stiff and pernicketty as ever she liked, for she couldn't interfere with us really; and she pleased people

very much, but they were sorry she was such an invalid."

"But do you mean to tell me that your father really talked about her to strangers?"

"Of course he did. That's what she was for; *we* didn't want her. So sympathetic he was; and then he'd break off and joke about her Low Church leanings—she always reads the *Rock*, does Aunt Emileen—and her woolwork, and her missionary box, and her very strict views of life and its responsibilities—oh, there were some people quite pitied me having such an old fuss to look after me."

Tony sighed.

"I really don't know which is the more incorrigible infant, you or your father. However, you'd better get to bed now and we can see in the morning what it will be best to do. I must see that chap at once; Ford announced him in the middle of your interesting narrative about Aunt Emileen. You must be dreadfully tired, poor child! I'll ask Matron to look after you to-night; come with me."

"Can't I just go and say good-night to those nice boys and see their little studies?"

"No, my dear, you most certainly can't. You must promise me, Lallie, that you will never go into the boys' part of the house unless I or Miss Foster be with you."

Lallie sighed deeply.

"I promise, Tony, but it is hard. I did like them so much, and it would have cheered me up."

The musical voice was most submissive, but in addition it suggested much fatigue and loneliness and disappointment; and poor Tony Bevan felt a perfect brute. Her dark eyes followed him reproachfully as he held the door open for her, and she paused on the threshold to say beseechingly:

"Don't try to be an Uncle Emileen, Tony; the part doesn't suit you one little bit, and I know you'll never be able to keep it up. I'll be a jewel of a girl and a paragon of propriety without you looking so solemn and trying to talk so preachey. You'll be quite used to me being here in a day or two, and I'm sure I'll get on with the boys like anything."

"My dear, you misunderstand me; I am delighted to have you, and I hope you will be

very happy. It is only that I am so sorry that Miss Foster——"

"Tony, if you talk any more about Miss Foster I'll pinch you. I tell you I'm thankful she's away. Now take me upstairs to my bed."

Matron, trim and neat in the uniform of a hospital nurse, met them at the bedroom door. Lallie held out both her hands in greeting.

"I'm ever so pleased to meet you, Matron, dear," she cried in her sweet voice. "You'll remember my brother, Paddy Clonmell? he's devoted to you, and I'm to give you his love and no end of messages."

The matron's kind, worn face beamed.

"Mr. Clonmell's sister, isn't it, sir?" she said, turning to Tony. "She has arrived before you expected her, so I've put her in Miss Foster's room for to-night. I will see that her own is all in order to-morrow. I'll look after her and take care that she is comfortable."

"Good-night, Lallie," said Tony, looking much relieved. "Don't trouble to get up to breakfast; Ford will bring you some upstairs. Sleep well!"

He turned to depart, but the girl came flying after him to the head of the stairs.

"Aren't you going to kiss me good-night, Tony?" she cried reproachfully, "an' me so tired and homesick and all."

She turned up her face towards his—the pathetic, tired child-face.

Tony Bevan's somewhat weather-beaten countenance turned a dusky crimson. He dropped a hasty kiss on the very top of her head and fled down the staircase without looking back.

Matron, standing in the doorway, watched the little scene with considerable interest.

"Perhaps he'd rather I didn't kiss him now I'm here," Lallie said meditatively. "What do you think, Matron?"

The girl evidently asked her opinion in all good faith, and the matron, who had a kind heart for everything young and a sincere liking for the head of the house, said diplomatically:

"Of course I know Mr. Bevan's just like a dear uncle to you and your brother; but if I was you, I don't think I'd expect him to kiss you while you're here. It is a bit different

being in a College House, you know, to what it is at home, now isn't it?"

"It is, indeed," Lallie agreed fervently. "Tony seems so funny, so stiff and stand-off; not a bit like he is when he comes over to us. We're all so fond of him, servants and everybody."

"Of course you are, and so you will be here," the matron said briskly. "Mr. Bevan is an exceedingly nice gentleman and a great favourite. But, you know, a gentleman who is a schoolmaster must be a bit strict in term time or he could never keep any order at all."

"You think that's it?" said Lallie, much comforted. "Of course I can understand that. Paddy said he was quite different with us over in Kerry to what he is here. I don't mind a bit if that's all. I was afraid perhaps he'd taken a dislike to me."

"I don't think anybody could do that," the matron remarked consolingly. "You see, Mr. Bevan only got your papa's letter, saying you were coming, this morning, and I know he didn't expect you for some days. Somehow, your papa had not made it clear you were

coming at once; and Mr. Bevan was upset to think that nothing was ready for you, and Miss Foster being away——"

"I'd rather have you than twenty Miss Fosters," cried Lallie, throwing her arms around Matron's neck. "You're a dear kind woman, and I love you."

CHAPTER II

MR. NICHOLL, Chairman of the Playground Committee—commonly known as "young Nick" to distinguish him from his brother, "old Nick," a master of irascible disposition—sat awaiting Tony Bevan's collaboration in that gentleman's comfortable study. While he waited, young Nick indulged in all manner of romantic surmises as to his colleague's probable engagement during the recent vacation. Young Nick was really young, and was not in the least short-sighted. The brilliantly lighted dining-room and its two occupants were almost forced upon his notice as he walked up the drive to B. House, and it was with the greatest interest, tempered by considerable good-natured amusement, that he beheld Tony Bevan, shyest and, apparently, most confirmed of bachelors, in an attitude that implied familiar, and even tender relations, with so young and attractive a girl.

"Sly dog, old Tony," he reflected. "Kept it uncommonly dark till he springs the girl upon us. She must be years younger than he is—wonder what she saw in old Tony? I'd like to know how the affair strikes Miss Foster—suppose she cleared out to give 'em a few minutes together. Shouldn't have chosen that room to spoon in if I'd been them—too public by far. Wonder how long he'll keep me waiting here? Shouldn't have thought old Tony would have had the courage to face Miss Foster. I'd have done it by letter if I'd been in his shoes; perhaps he did. Anyway, she won't half like it. Thought she was a fixture here for evermore, and pitied old Tony from the bottom of my heart. Well! Well! If ever a man was safe from matrimony, old Tony seemed that chap—but no one's safe. Only she really does look rather too much of a kiddie for him. Good old Tony! he's a thorough sportsman and deserves the best of luck, but it's quaint of him to spring her upon us without saying a word first. I wonder why now——"

Here young Nick's reflections were interrupted by the entrance of their subject, a little

breathless; a little rumpled about the hair, for Lallie at parting had thrown her arms about his neck with more warmth than discretion; a little stirred out of his usual comfortable serenity.

Young Nick held out his hand, smiling broadly.

"It's no use pretending I didn't see, old chap, for I did. Heartiest grats.——"

Tony Bevan stepped back a pace, nor did he make any attempt to clasp the proffered hand. "Look here, Nicholl. For heaven's sake don't let there be any mistake of that sort; that child is Paddy Clonmell's sister——"

Tony paused; and young Nick, thoroughly enjoying his evident discomfort, remarked encouragingly.

"Well, there's no objection in that, is there?"

"Confound it!" Tony Bevan exclaimed angrily. "You've got hold of a totally wrong idea; that child has been sent to me by her father—by her father, mind you—to look after while he goes big game shooting in India this winter. I've known her since she was a month old, and I've known him since I was his fag here, five-and-twenty years ago. She's always

looked on me as a sort of uncle, and she's demonstrative, poor little girl, like all the Irish——"

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure," said young Nick, with blue eyes that would twinkle merrily in spite of all his efforts to the contrary; "but you must confess it was a natural misconception. You see, you'd kept it so uncommonly dark about her coming."

"Kept it dark!" Tony echoed indignantly. "Kept it dark! Why, I only knew myself that Clonmell wanted me to have her this morning; and in his letter he said, 'in a week or so'; then the child appears to-night, wholly unexpectedly, and it's deuced awkward, for Miss Foster's gone away for the week-end to a niece's wedding."

"Can't you get one of the married masters to have her till Miss Foster comes back?"

"No, I can't do that; she'd be awfully hurt. They're all the soul of hospitality themselves, and I could never make her understand my reasons. I must worry through somehow, only don't you go off with any ridiculously wrong impression."

"Of course not, of course not," young Nick remarked solemnly, still gazing at Tony with eyes that seemed unable quite to see him in this new rôle of guardian to a young lady.

They stared at each other in silence for a minute, and what young Nick saw was a broad-shouldered, tall man, rather short-necked, very square-jawed, brown and weather-beaten as to complexion; a well-shaved man with a trustworthy but by no means beautiful mouth, except when he smiled, when two rows of strong, absolutely perfect teeth, redeemed its plainness. Of Tony Bevan's nose, the less said the better. It was inconspicuous and far from classical in shape, but his eyes were really fine: humorous, clear, very brown eyes that were in truth the mirrors of a kind and candid soul. His head was good, with plenty of breadth and height above the ear; his hair thick and usually very smooth and sleek.

"Clonmell senior must surely have married very young if you were his fag here," young Nick continued.

"Clonmell married in his second year at Balliol, and Lallie and Paddy were born while

he was still an undergraduate. He's just twenty-three years older than the twins—in years; in mind and conduct I do believe he's younger than either of them, and heaven knows they're young enough. Of course the Balliol authorities were furious at his marriage, but he was so brilliant, they let him stay on, for they didn't want to lose him. He was up five years you know, and took all sorts of honours in classics. It was just the same here; any other chap would have got the sack for half the things he did, but they knew he was safe for a Balliol scholarship and didn't want to lose him."

"I've seen his name up in the big classical. Was he like Paddy?"

"Very like Paddy. Didn't you see him when he was down here for the last concert, standing on a chair and singing 'Auld Lang Syne,' long after he ought to have shut up? Paddy's the living image of what he was at the same age, but hasn't half his brains. When he was here he had his prefect's star taken away three times; got it back; and finally they had to make him head of his house, for he was

already captain of the eleven; and for years won every short race in the sports. But you could never tell what he'd do next. It wasn't that he broke rules, so much as that he always seemed to think of doing things no mortal had conceived possible. No code of rules on earth could be framed to forbid the doings of Fitzroy Clonmell."

"Yet I suppose he was a good chap, really? Paddy was a thoroughly nice boy, with all his vagaries."

"So was his father. Everybody liked him; everybody likes him to this day. He looks far too young to be anybody's father, and is tremendously popular wherever he is; but he's never in one place long—he's the most restless fellow in the world—and now he has gone to India, and left Lallie on my hands."

"Surely it was an odd thing to do? A house for boys in a public school seems an incongruous sort of place to select."

"It's just because it is a house for boys he has selected it. His theory is that nowhere is a girl so safe as surrounded by boys and men. I can see his reasoning myself, but you can't

make the world see it. However, we'd better get those times fixed up and fit in the various teams. All that beastly physical drill to arrange, too—but you understand, don't you, Nicholl?"

"I quite understand," young Nick replied with so profound a gravity that Tony instantly suspected him of a desire to laugh.

They lit their pipes, and for an hour or more wrestled with the problem in hand. Then young Nick departed.

The instant Tony was left alone he sat him down in a comfortable chair, switched on the electric light behind his head, and drew from his pocket a letter. First of all he looked at the date, which he had not done when he read it in the morning. It was dated eight days back, but the postmark was that of the day before.

"Dear old Tony," it ran, "one always thinks of you when one wants anything done in a hurry, and done most uncommonly well. That's what you get by being so confoundedly conscientious and good-natured. The combination is a rare one. I, for instance, am

good-natured, but my worst enemy couldn't call me tiresomely conscientious. Whenever you see my handwriting, you will say, 'Wonder what young Fitz wants now? Of course he wants something,' and of course I do. I want you to look after Lallie for me till the end of March. You've got a magnificent big house—far too large for a bachelor like you. You've got a lady-housekeeper whose manifest propriety is so stupendous that even Paddy is awed by it—a lady, I am sure, estimable in every respect—and you have fifty boys ranging from thirteen to nineteen. Oh, yes! and I forgot the worthy Paunch and Val. Now if you can't, amongst you, look after my little girl for six months you ought to be ashamed of yourselves. She's too old to put to school; I don't want to leave her with hunting friends where she'd be engaged and perhaps married before I got back. Young men are for ever falling in love with Lallie of late, and it's a terrible nuisance. She cares not a penny for any of them, so long as I am there to prove by comparison how inferior they all are to her own father. But with me away, who knows but that their blandishments might prevail? And I have other plans for Lallie—but not yet. As you know, I've brought her up in a sensible reasonable human sort of fashion. She has

been taught to look upon mankind—and by mankind I mean the male portion of humanity—as fellow creatures, just as much deserving of kindness and trust and straightforward dealing as girls or women; and because she looks upon them as fellow-creatures, with no ridiculous mystery or conventional barriers between her and them, she is far safer than most girls not to make a fool of herself or to be taken in by cheap external attractions. Of course she's a bit of a flirt—what self-respecting Irish girl is not?—and your big boys will all be sighing at her shrine, but it will neither do them nor her any harm.

"I don't often speak of Alice these days, but I never forget, and I know you'll be kind to my little girl for her sake. Let the child go to the dancing school, though there's little they can teach her; and she can keep up her singing, and perhaps she'd better ride, though riding with a master will be little to Lallie's taste. I enclose a cheque for the lessons, etc. She's a good girl, Tony; and in spite of her unusually sensible up-bringing, is as delicately feminine in all her instincts as any old Tabby in Hamchester.

"Lord Nenogh offered me third gun in his shoot in India this cold weather, and I couldn't resist it. I was getting a bit musty. I've been

bear-leading those children for eighteen months —ever since dear old Madame died. Lallie and I always hit it off perfectly, but Paddy's too like me, and gets on my nerves and reminds me that I'm not so young as I was, and I felt I needed a complete change of scene and people, if I am to remain the agreeable fellow I always have been; and I couldn't take Lallie with me tiger shooting, now could I? We sail from Marseilles in the *Mooltan* on the 29th; send me a line to the *poste restante* there, just to tell me that my property has duly reached you—as it should about the 23rd. Till then I shall be flying about all over the place.

"Take care of my Lallie.

"Yours as ever,

"FITZ."

The writing was small, close, upright, and distinct. When he had read the letter through Tony examined the envelope and found from its appearance that it had evidently spent a considerable time in somebody's pocket: either that of the writer or of some untrustworthy messenger.

He lit another pipe, and as he watched the fragrant clouds of smoke roll forth and spend themselves about the room, his mind was busy

with memories of Fitzroy Clonmell; brilliant, inconsequent, lovable failure.

"He wouldn't have been a failure if his wife had lived," Tony always maintained to those who, remembering Fitz and his early promise of notable achievements, lamented his falling off; his wholesale violation of those youthful pledges.

Tony found himself going back to those first years at Oxford, when brilliant Fitz did all he could to push his young schoolfellow among the athletic set, where, reading man as Fitz undoubtedly had been then, his place was quite as assured as in the schools. Tony remembered his shock of surprise when in his first term he went to Clonmell's rooms in the High, to find them tenanted by a brown-haired, gentle-voiced girl who informed him she was "Mrs. Clonmell"—Alice Clonmell.

> "Oh, don't you remember sweet Alice, Ben Bolt?
> Sweet Alice, with hair hazel brown"—

Fitz used to sing at a time when the whole world read "Trilby," and make eyes at his wife the while. She was very kind to Tony, and he adored her with the humble dog-like

devotion of a rather plain and awkward youth whom ladies usually ignored.

He remembered the wrath of the Balliol authorities, and Fitz's account of his stormy interview with the little Master, and how after much of what Fitz called "fruitless altercation," he wheedled the Master into coming to see Alice. Whereupon that dignitary observed that "there were, perhaps, extenuating circumstances, which must be taken into consideration."

By and by there came the twins, who were known as "the Balliol Babies."

Fitz, to the disappointment of all his friends, was called to the Irish, not the English, Bar. But he was Irish before all else, and declared that his brilliant abilities were far too precious and illuminating to be taken out of his own country.

He practised with some success in Dublin. People began to talk of him as a young lawyer who had arrived, when Alice met with the carriage accident which caused her death.

Fitz threw up all his prospects at the Bar, left Ireland, and, with the two children and

their old nurse, wandered about Europe for a while, finally settling them in a tiny hill-side villa near the village of Veulettes, in Normandy, with an old French lady, in charge as governess. It happened at that time that his own little property near Cahirciveen in County Kerry, which had been let on a long lease during his minority, fell vacant, and Fitz went back there for the spring months, taking Madame, his French cook, and his children with him. He kept on the villa at Veulettes, and the family lived alternately in Kerry and in Normandy, as it happened to suit its erratic head. Fitz was a keen fisherman, and a good shot. The fishing at Cahirciveen was beyond reproach. When he wanted good hunting he took a little house for the season either in Kildare or some hunting county in England, and wherever he went Madame and Lallie, the Irish nurse and Celestine the French cook, went in his train, and they were joined in the vacations by Paddy, who had been sent to preparatory school at a very tender age.

Tony's pipe went out as he sat thinking of the innumerable vacations he had spent with

the Clonmells; of their warm-hearted and tireless hospitality shown to him wherever that somewhat nomadic family happened to be. No one knew better than Tony Bevan that Fitzroy Clonmell would gladly share all he possessed with him, to the half of his kingdom; and looking back down the long valley of years that lay behind him, Tony could not see one that was not brightened by a thousand kindnesses from Fitz. From the time he came as an ugly little fourth-form boy to Hamchester, where Fitz was the idol of the lower school, the admiration of all the bloods, and the trial and terror of most of the masters, he had nothing to remember of him but good-nature, good feeling, and good friendship. Fitz was casual, erratic, eccentric; nothing was stable about him except his affections. The affections of his friends he often strained almost to the snapping point by his irritating incapacity for observing regular days or hours or ordinary conventions; but somehow the strained affections always contracted into place again, and people shrugged their shoulders and exclaimed, "Just like Fitz!" and forgave him in the long run,

till he made them angry again, when a precisely similar process was repeated.

Tony saw as in a vision innumerable pictures of Lallie as an elf-like small girl who always responded with enthusiastic affection to the rather shy advances of the strong ugly young man who was so good at games, so popular with his fellow sportsmen, so extremely shy in any other society.

Every stranger noticed handsome Paddy, even as a baby; but for the most part they passed Lallie by in her childhood, and Tony's notice and affection were very precious to her. He and the quaint, pale-faced little girl had much in common: they understood one another. He hadn't seen Lallie for over a year, and during that time she had changed and developed. Her manner had acquired a certain poise and balance wholly lacking to the wild, shy nymph of Irish river and Norman hillside that he knew so well.

Old Madame's death had made her not only more than ever the companion of her father, but it had also made her mistress of his house, and Lallie had found in herself all sorts of

latent powers and possibilities, hitherto wholly unsuspected, and these had crystallised into qualities. Tony realised that while she was temperamentally the same Lallie—subtle, sensitive, responsive to every smallest change in the mental atmosphere—a new Lallie had arisen, who would be by no means so easily dealt with, and a shrewd suspicion flashed across his mind that Fitzroy Clonmell was equally aware of the change, and that with his customary cleverness he had shifted the responsibility on to other shoulders than his own.

Tony sat so still that Val came from under the chair, stretched himself, and laid his head softly on his master's knees, regarding him with tenderly inquiring eyes. The clock on the mantelpiece struck twelve, and Tony arose.

"Time for bed, old chap," he said, "but we'll have a look at the night first."

He and the dog went out into the garden, and Tony looked up at the black bulk of the house against the moonlit sky. The great dormitories in the wing lay stark and silent, all their teeming life wrapped in the silence of

healthy boyhood's slumber; and there too, in Miss Foster's room above his own study, lay Lallie—Lallie, with her bodyguard of fifty boys. He smiled at the quaint fancy. Val rubbed himself against his master's legs.

"Well, Val, we must do our best to take care of her," said Tony, "but I can't have her flirting with my boys and upsetting them. That would never do. However, it isn't as if she was one of those flaringly pretty girls that every fellow turns round to look at."

Somehow this reflection did not seem to afford much comfort to Tony. A vision of Lallie's face lifted to his as she said good-night came between him and the comfortable assurance that she, at all events, was not pretty. How soft her dark hair was!—and it smelt of violets. Poor little motherless, warm-hearted Lallie!

He saw Val comfortably settled in his basket, and went quietly up the dark staircase. He paused outside Lallie's door to listen; all was perfectly still. In another half-hour every soul in B. House was fast asleep.

CHAPTER III

LALLIE woke with a start, a great bell was clanging—it seemed to her in the middle of the night—then she realised where she was, remembered that Paddy had told her the rising bell rang at seven, and turned over and went to sleep again, only to be awakened by another bell, equally loud, an hour later.

This time Lallie sat up in bed, pushed her hair out of her eyes, and looked about her. A long shaft of sunlight stretched across the room through the gap made by a green blind that did not exactly fit its window. The windows were open, and a gay little breeze moved the blinds gently to and fro. Miss Foster's room was large and stately and handsomely furnished; but somehow it lacked individuality: it was impossible to divine, even to make a guess at Miss Foster's characteristics from her bedroom.

"She must be a paragon of tidiness," thought Lallie; "but perhaps that's Ford. After all,

the woman can't leave things about when she's away, so I won't hate her for that. I wonder what she'd say if some one showed her one of those gazing crystals and she beheld me lying here in her bed!" Lallie smiled as she pictured Miss Foster's astonishment, and perhaps some thought of the same kind occurred to Ford, who at that moment appeared bearing a breakfast tray, for she gave vent to a little sound, as she crossed the room, that might have been mistaken for a suppressed giggle had not her appearance been so severely servant-like and respectful.

"Mr. Bevan sent his kind regards, miss, and hopes as you're rested; and he says you're not to get up, but take it quietly this morning after such a long journey. Shall I pull up your blinds, miss, or would you prefer the shaded light?"

Ford shot out the words all in one breath, and deposited the tray on a little table beside the bed.

"Pull them all up, Ford. Oh, what a beautiful morning! Give Mr. Bevan my love and say I slept beautifully; and Miss Foster's bed,

and Miss Foster's room, and the view from Miss Foster's windows, and everything that is hers is charming."

Ford waited in respectful silence till she had settled the tray on Lallie's knees.

"You'll give me a hand with backs and things, won't you, Ford? Nearly all my frocks fasten behind—'tis the stupid fashion of the present day, but it can't be helped. I'm afraid I shall make a good deal more work for you, Ford, but Daddie said I was to tell you he'll make it worth while at Christmas. You see, we didn't know whether T—whether Mr. Bevan would have room for Bridget; she's my old nurse, and she does everything for me at home, but she's a bit difficult with other servants. Do you think you'll be able to manage for me, Ford?"

"I shall be very pleased to do my best, miss," said Ford demurely. "You see, I'm private parlourmaid; I've nothing to do with the young gentlemen's part of the 'ouse, and Miss Foster requires very little waiting on——"

"Oh, dear!" sighed Lallie; "not like me, but I'll try and be tidy in my room. Madame

made me be that though Bridget spoiled me. Now don't let me be keeping you; I'll ring when I want to get up and you'll come and show me the bath-room."

When Ford reached the kitchen region again, she remarked to the cook:

"I don't know what it is about that young lady—she's not much to look at—but there's something about her that makes you want to do every mortal thing she wants the minute she's as't you—I think it must be her voice, it's that funny and weedlin'."

Cripps, the captain of the College fives, was in quarantine for mumps. An inconsiderate little sister had developed this disease two days after his return to school, and his mother being honest and considerate had hastened to inform Tony of the fact by telegram. Hence, Cripps, in rude health and the very worst of tempers, was removed from the society of his fellows to the drear seclusion of the sick-room by night and of the garden by day, or such parts of the neighbourhood as were in bounds, while the boys were in College. The rest of the inhabitants of Hamchester might take their chance.

But Cripps, that morning, felt no inclination for a walk; savage and solitary he armed himself with a deck-chair and the "Adventures of Sherlock Holmes," and sat him down under an elm at the edge of the tennis lawn nearest that side of B. House which contained Miss Foster's room. Thus it came about that Lallie, having with the assistance of Ford arrayed herself in a white cambric frock, dismissed that excellent handmaid, and leaning out of the window beheld Cripps.

A boy—a big boy, with broad shoulders and a brown face and hair that stood up on end in front; a boy lying in a deck-chair and reading a novel at eleven o'clock on a Saturday morning. Lallie was devoured by curiosity. What was that boy doing there? Was he some old Hamchestrian staying in the house? No; he looked too youthful for that. Why was he not in College with the others?

Cripps turned a page and yawned widely, showing his white even teeth.

The September sun was hot and he felt sleepy. "The probity of parents sets the children's teeth on edge," said Cripps to himself,

with a vague idea that he was quoting Scripture. He laid Sherlock Holmes face downwards on his knee and closed his eyes. What a long morning it had been! Might the maledictions of all righteous men fall upon that most mischievous of trivial diseases called mumps! Why had no doctor discovered the mump microbe and taken steps to stamp out the whole noxious tribe? They were footling fellows these doctors on the whole; all this trouble arose from the idiotic habit little girls have of kissing one another. Probably his little sister had kissed some wretched pig-tailed brat who was— Cripps had almost forgotten his wrongs in slumber when he was startled by a full sweet voice which carolled——

"Captain, art tha' sleeping down below?"

Cripps sat up very straight and looked about him.

"Why are you not in College?" the voice asked again.

Cripps looked up in the direction of the voice and leapt to his feet. Sherlock Holmes fell neglected on the grass.

Lallie was leaning out of the window just above him.

"I beg your pardon," he exclaimed politely; "I didn't know you were there."

"Naturally, for you were asleep. Now how comes it that you were falling asleep in the middle of the morning? That's what I want to know. Are you stopping with T—with Mr. Bevan too?"

Cripps longed to pose as a visitor, but honesty, like many worse things, is sometimes hereditary, so he hung his head and mumbled dismally:

"No, I'm one of the chaps; but I'm in quarantine—for mumps of all beastly silly diseases. I know I shan't have it, too."

"Poor boy," said Lallie sympathetically, "I hope you won't. I've had it, and it's horrible. Paddy brought it back from here once and gave it to me. It seems to me that the boys in this house are always having something."

"We don't have half as many things as the other houses," Cripps retorted indignantly, "and I haven't *got* it, it's my beastly little sister——"

"Now that's not nice of you," said Lallie reprovingly, "to speak of the poor little girl like that; no mortal could *want* mumps. But I don't think I can keep bawling to you from here. I'll come down if you can ferret out another chair—not a mumpy one, mind—and I'll try and bring you to a more Christian frame of mind."

She vanished from the window and Cripps flew to the summer house to fetch one of Tony's most luxurious garden chairs, feeling that for once the fates had not dealt unkindly with him when they put him in quarantine.

Across the lawn towards him came Lallie, swinging a green silk bag.

"Do you like your feet up?" asked the gallant Cripps. "There's a piece that pulls out."

"Thank you—it *would* be a pity to waste these shoes, wouldn't it?"

And Lallie subsided into a long chair which supported her very pretty feet, shod in shiny shoes with buckles and Louis Quinze heels. From the green silk bag she drew forth a roll, which proved to be lace, and she began to sew diligently.

"What pretty work!" said Cripps, drawing up his chair to face hers.

"It's a strip of Limerick lace I'm making, and I've just got to a 'basket.' The light's good, so I thought I'd do it this morning."

"May I see it close?" asked Cripps, wishing she would look at him instead of at her lace, though black eyelashes resting on rounded cheeks are by no means a disagreeable prospect.

This morning Lallie was not so pale. Her cheeks were never really rosy, but they were fresh, with a delicate, faint colour like the inside of certain shells. She held out the roll of work towards Cripps, and he took hold of one end while she unpinned the other and spread out the lace.

"By Jove!" said Cripps, but it was not at the lace he was looking so much as at Lallie's hand. Such an absurd small hand compared to his; so white, with beautiful pink filbert-shaped nails.

"It's pretty, isn't it?" said Lallie, of her lace.

"Awfully," said Cripps. "Whatever size do you take?"

"How d'you mean? You don't make lace in sizes."

"I beg your pardon, I was thinking of your hands. Look at them—compared to mine!"

"Now don't you be reproaching me with being so little. It's no fault of mine nor no wish; I've done my best to grow, but it's no use. I'm the only little person in a tall family, and it's very out-of-date for a girl to be small nowadays. I'm a sort of survival of the obsolete, and if I live to be old, I'll be looked upon as a sort of rarity, and people will come miles to see me."

"I should think people do that now," said Cripps, still keeping tight hold of the lace.

Lallie let go her end of it and looked at him.

"Now that's very kind of you to say that—really kind and nice. I wonder if all *your* family are exceptionally good-looking, because, if so, perhaps you can sympathise with me. Are they?"

"Well, no, I don't think they are," Cripps said, getting very red. "I really have never thought about it; one doesn't, you know, with one's own people."

"You'd have to if you were like me," Lallie sighed. "Dad is tremendously good-looking; so's Paddy—don't you think so?"

"Ye-e-e-s," Cripps answered, without enthusiasm, "I suppose he is; but one doesn't notice that sort of thing much in fellows——"

"I think it's their noses that make them so distinguished," Lallie continued meditatively. "Dad's and Paddy's, I mean. Now, my nose begins well, it does really—but it changes its character half way; and it's got a confiding tip, and that isn't in the least distinguished. My only consolation is, it isn't often red."

"I think it's an extremely neat nose," Cripps said, with convincing sincerity.

"Neat, but not gaudy! Ah, well, it's the best I've got, anyway, and I can smell anything burning in the kitchen quicker than most people. But all the same, I think it must be very agreeable to be so good-looking that people want to please you just because of it, without you doing anything at all. That's the way with Dad and Paddy. Now ordinary folks like you and me—I hope you don't mind rowing in the same boat with

me?—have to be nice to people if we want them to like us."

"Is Paddy Clonmell your brother?"

"My twin brother, but we're not a bit alike, even in disposition, though we're the best of friends and I adore him. What are you celebrated for, and I'll see if I can't tell you your name; I've heard about most of you."

Cripps blushed.

"I'm afraid I'm not celebrated at all," he said modestly. "I'm only in Upper V.; I don't suppose you've ever heard of me."

Lallie laid down her work and looked at Cripps critically.

"I'll try again," she said. "Are you a College colour?"

"Yes."

"Cricket?"

"Oh, no, I'm no good at all."

"Football?"

"Yes."

"Fives?"

"Yes."

"Then you're two, and that's very grand; and I think," said Lallie slowly, her eyes wan-

dering from her companion's face to the book lying on the grass and back again—"then I think you must be Mr. Cripps, the captain of the College fives. Now aren't I a witch of a guesser?"

Distinctly gratified, Cripps duly expressed surprise at her discernment. Lallie's sight was good, and she had seen his name on the paper copy of Sherlock Holmes lying on the grass. They continued to chat happily till morning school was over, and Tony Bevan rushed back to B. House to see after his guest. She saw him coming and flew to meet him, crying:

"Oh, Tony, I've been so happy in your garden, and Mr. Cripps has been so kind and nice, and has entertained me all the morning. It's been very pleasant having him to talk to."

Tony smiled down at the radiant upturned face.

"You don't look a bit tired this morning, Lallie," he said, "and I'm glad you've not been dull; but I'd forgotten all about Cripps, and I'm not sure that you ought to have been talking to him at all. He's contraband, you know, a suspect——"

"He told me all about it, Tony; and I've had the silly thing, and we were out of doors, so it couldn't matter, now could it?"

"Get your hat on now, Lallie, you are going to lunch with Mrs. Wentworth, the Principal's wife; I've seen her about you and she has kindly promised to mother you as much as possible till Miss Foster comes back."

Lallie's face fell.

"Oh, Tony," she exclaimed, "can't I have lunch with you and all the boys this first day? Can't I stop here just for to-day?"

"You'll have lunch here hundreds of times, and I've made the engagement for you to-day. Hurry, my child, for I haven't a minute."

Lallie didn't take long to get her hat—a big white one. She also wore a pair of long white gloves, and still carried the green silk bag, the only touch of colour about her. Tony looked at her with kind, approving eyes. How well the child carried herself; how girlish and fresh she was; and in her own quaint way, how full of the distinction she thought she lacked. But he felt some misgivings all the same—was she so unnoticeable? that was the question.

"How did you manage to find Cripps?" he asked, as they hurried up the wide tree-bordered road leading from B. House to the College, now full of boys hurrying to and fro from their various houses.

"I saw him from the window, and he was nearly asleep, so I called to him and he looked up; he's such a nice kind boy—we're great friends already."

"Oh, are you?" Tony said, rather drily. "Where was Matron?"

"I haven't seen the dear matron this morning; you see, I went straight out whenever I was dressed. Oh, I did enjoy my lazy lie this morning, Tony, but I'll be up with the lark to-morrow."

"Don't you think you'd be better to breakfast in bed until you have got thoroughly rested?" Tony said nervously. "There's no need for you to get up, and it makes such a long morning. Hadn't you better breakfast in bed till——"

"Miss Foster comes back, I suppose," snapped Lallie. "Why would you be hiding me out of sight all the time, Tony? Are you ashamed of me?"

She stood still in the middle of the road, flushed and angry.

"My dear child, ashamed!" the worried Tony repeated. "What an extraordinary idea! don't stand there, Lallie, the boys are staring at you. Doesn't it prove how anxious I am to show you off to my friends that I haven't lost a minute in introducing you to the chief lady of our community?"

"I'm sorry I was cross, Tony, but somehow, ever since I came, I've felt that *you* felt I oughtn't to be here; that—well, that I'm in a kind of way in quarantine, like poor Cripps, and that only Miss Foster's return will remove the infection."

"Lallie, you're too sharp altogether; you're not so far out though this time, and I begin to sympathise with your father's introduction of Aunt Emileen. But I promise you you'll be happy this afternoon; and this evening I'll bring my work into the drawing-room beside you. I must do it, but you won't feel lonely if I'm there, will you? No, Lallie, you must not try to embrace me in the street! the boys are looking at you!"

"Who's trying to embrace you, you conceited man? I was only taking your arm, and that you might have offered me. I promised Matron I wouldn't try to kiss you any more here."

"Promised Matron! What the dickens has Matron got to do with it?" It was Tony who stopped this time, and his voice was the reverse of pleased.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear! you're like the animals in 'Alice,' Tony, there's no pleasing you at all, at all. May I point out that at the present moment several boys are looking at you!"

"But, Lallie, you must explain what you mean; you say such extraordinary things——"

"Not at all, it's all the other way; but I'll try and remember to be stiff and prim; only one minute you're so nasty and the next you're so nice that action of some sort seems imperative—oh, dear, we're there! What a big house! Is she terrible, Tony? Will *she* think I'm all mumpy too? You won't leave me; you'll see me safe in——"

CHAPTER IV

IN Hamchester College the headmaster, Dr. Wentworth, like other headmasters, is a much criticised man. He has his partisans, he has also his detractors. Were an angel from heaven to descend and become headmaster of a large public school he would find plenty of adverse critics, and these were by no means lacking to Dr. Wentworth. But about his wife, there were no two opinions. Six hundred boys and all the masters agreed in thinking her perfectly delightful. So kind was she, so friendly, so simple and believing in the good intentions of others, that quite curmudgeony people melted into amiability in the sunshine of her presence. Perhaps one of the boys best summed up her mysterious charm when he said, "She doesn't try to be nice to a chap, she just *is* nice; and there's such a difference."

Therefore when Tony, having sat in her drawing-room for five minutes, prepared to

depart—not without misgivings as to how Lallie would take it—that damsel nodded at him coolly, without so much as a supplicating glance after his retreating form, and when he had gone she turned to her hostess with a little laugh that ended in a sigh.

"Poor man," she said, "I'm afraid I'm a regular white elephant to him just now; but I can't make myself invisible, can I?"

"I think we'd all be very sorry if you were invisible. Come now, and see my chicks," and kind Mrs. Wentworth led Lallie upstairs and down a long passage to a big sunny room where two little girls sat painting at the table.

"This is Pris and this is Prue, and that over there is Punch!" Mrs. Wentworth said, indicating her offsprings.

Pris and Prue lifted small flushed faces from their artistic efforts, and surveyed Lallie with large solemn eyes, and each held out a small hand liberally besmeared with Prussian blue.

"How do you do?" said Pris politely. "I'm seven; how old are you?"

"I'm six," added Prue.

Punch, a rolly-polly person who was apparently engaged in dismembering a woolly lamb, remarked loudly and distinctly, "I'm a boy."

"May I paint?" asked Lallie.

"Oh, do, you can have my seat for a bit. You might do some legs; they run over so, somehow, with me."

Lallie sat down in front of Prue's picture, which was an elaborate *Graphic* illustration of the "Relief of Ladysmith."

"I'm sure Sir George White's tunic was not pink," Lallie objected. "They wore khaki, you know."

"I don't like khaki; it's the colour of mustard, an' I hate mustard; my new sash is pink, an' I like pink. *My* soldiers wear pink; you may paint their legs khaki if you like."

"It looks very stormy overhead," Lallie remarked. "Was there a thunderstorm at the Relief of Ladysmith?"

"My uncle was there," said Pris, as though that accounted for it.

"I'll leave you for a few minutes while I write a note," said Mrs. Wentworth. "Take care of this young lady; be very kind to her.

She has come to stay with Mr. Bevan, and she'll come and see you often if you are good."

The moment the door closed behind their mother, regardless of the protests of their nurse, who was sewing at the window, the children crowded round Lallie, and all three tried to sit upon her at once.

"Are you *quite* a grown-up lady?" asked Pris doubtfully.

"No," said Lallie, "I'm a little girl——"

"You're a bit bigger than me," Prue granted somewhat grudgingly, "but I thought you weren't quite grown-up. Punch is only four."

"I'm a very old four," Punch maintained.

"Do you think," asked Prue, "that you could tell us a story?"

"Do I not?" Lallie answered, and in another minute she had the children absorbed in the legend of that "quiet, decent man, Andrew Coffy"; so that when her hostess came back to fetch her to lunch Lallie appeared, as it were, buried beneath the family of Wentworth.

Dr. Wentworth seemed sufficiently awe-inspiring to the outside world, but his family took a different view of him, and Pris at

luncheon generally addressed her father as "Poor dear," or spoke of him as "That child."

Mrs. Wentworth was wont to declare to her intimates that no schoolmaster could possibly be endurable who was not well sat upon in the bosom of his family.

"Personally," she said, "I have the greatest admiration for my husband, and consider him quite an excellent sort of ordinary man; but being a headmaster, if I didn't make him positively skip off his pedestal his sense of proportion would die of inanition."

Certainly neither Miss Prudence nor Miss Patience Wentworth manifested the smallest awe of their parent; and Lallie was moved to take his side in several arguments that ensued during luncheon.

Prue was rosy and brown-eyed, with thick short hair that framed her round face deliciously. Pris was fair-haired, blue-eyed, with a face like a monthly rose. Punch's countenance resembled a full moon, and all three children were plump and healthy and absolutely good-tempered. In fact, the whole Wentworth family were rather roundabout, which perhaps

accounted for their amiability. Lallie endeared herself immediately to Mrs. Wentworth by her extreme popularity with the children. Even the imperturbable Punch unbent so far as to say: "I like you. You may come and have dinner with us every day. You speak in such a funny voice."

CHAPTER V

TONY BEVAN did not meet Lallie again that day until nearly dinner time. It is true that during the afternoon he beheld her afar off across the College field, sitting on a seat beside the Principal's wife and watching the pick-up. He noted moreover that behind her stood a little group of the younger masters, and that they appeared deeply interested in her remarks; while her attention to the game was close and enthusiastic. She was in good hands, and Tony was quite happy about her. He had a great many things to do and to see to, so he left the field with a contented mind.

Mrs. Wentworth had promised to keep her to tea, and after tea he had to give a private lesson to two of the University scholarship people, so that it was almost seven o'clock when he entered his own hall to be met by a sound of music, and stood still to listen.

It was unusual music: vibrating, pulsating, mysterious; rising and falling in waves of sound that billowed hither and thither like the mist on the heath, the strain now soft and seductive, now loud and menacing; again humming with the slumbrous, slow drone of honey-gathering bees on a sunny afternoon in high summer. It was music that above all suggested thyme-scented, wind-swept spaces, rock and river, and shady, solemn woods. It was the sound of Lallie's harp.

He remembered to have noticed the big case in the hall as he went out to College that morning. Who had taken it out and carried it into the drawing-room for her? he wondered. She certainly couldn't have done it herself, for it was very heavy.

He opened the drawing-room door and went in, closing it softly behind him. The window at the end of the room was wide open, but a small fire burned cheerfully upon the hearth, and save for its uncertain light the room was shadowy and almost dark. Tony's first thought was of how shocked Miss Foster would be at the extravagance of a fire on such a warm night;

but this reflection was speedily superseded by astonishment at the sight of his "driver," Mr. Johns, and young Nick seated side by side upon a sofa near the fire, while Lallie sat at her big harp right in the middle of the room, and discoursed weird music to her evidently appreciative audience.

She had already changed for dinner, and her gown—high-waisted, long and clinging—fell in straight folds to her feet. Neck and arms were bare, and beautiful old lace was draped about her white shoulders. In colour her dress was of the soft yet brilliant green of July grass in a grass-country where there is much rain. A green ribbon threaded through her dusky hair was her only ornament save a wide gold band that clasped her bare arm just above the elbow and caught the flickering firelight in ruddy gleams as her slender, purposeful hands flashed to and fro over the enormous strings, with long, swooping movements, assured and definite in design and result as the swift stoop of a hawk.

Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes large and bright, and as the fire suddenly leapt into clearer flame every farthest corner of the room

was revealed sharp and distinct, and her girlish figure seemed a sudden incarnation of the Celtic muse.

Tony stood where he was just inside the door. Lallie faced him, but she took no notice of his entrance till the last long arpeggio had shivered into silence; then, in the most matter-of-fact tone, she remarked:

"On Monday, Tony, we must hire a piano."

Tony felt the sudden shock of disillusionment that comes with the fall of the curtain after a play that has thrilled the senses with its large romance—the blank sensation that life is really rather a prosaic business after all. He did not answer immediately, and in the meantime Paunch and young Nick had arisen in some haste from their sofa, the latter exclaiming confusedly:

"I had no idea it was so late. I met Miss Clonmell at the Principal's, and walked home with her, to show her the way."

"And as he'd never heard a harp properly played," Lallie added, "I told him that if he liked to wait, I'd change and come down and play till you came in; and on the stairs I met

Mr. Johns, and *he'd* never heard a harp either, so he came too."

"How did you get it out of the wooden case?" asked Tony.

"Oh, they unpacked it and carried it in for me while I dressed; and they've put the case in the box-room and all—ever so tidy we've been. Come here, Mr. Johns, and put it in the corner for me—no, not that one, that's an outer wall. This one, by the writing-table. Thank you; that will do nicely. Good-night, Mr. Nick. I beg your pardon, it's Paddy's fault; I always stumble into the wrong names that I've no business to know. Next time you come I'll sing for you, but I've never any voice after a voyage."

Dinner that night was an unusually cheerful meal, and by the time Tony carried in his work to the drawing-room that he might correct it beside Lallie, it was nearly nine o'clock.

Everything was arranged for his comfort when he did appear. A table at his elbow to hold his papers, his chair at the exact angle where he would get the best light, and Lallie

standing on the hearth-rug with a box of matches in her hand ready to light his pipe.

"Oh, I say, Lallie!" said Tony, yielding weakly to temptation. "D'you think I may? No one has ever smoked in this room. I don't know what Miss Foster would say."

"A pipe, Tony! Surely a little pipe will do no harm? Why, the window's wide open and there's a fire; and there are very few hangings and precious little furniture. Never did I see such a bare, stiff room. I had to have a little bit of fire to help furnish it. There's one good thing, it will be a capital room for sound, and a grand piano will fill it up a bit. Now sit down, and I won't speak another word till you speak to me."

Lallie pushed him down in his chair and fetched a stool on which she seated herself, leaning her back against Tony's knees, on her own she laid an open book, and in her hands was a piece of knitting.

For a few minutes there was absolute silence. Tony Bevan tried to absorb himself in the Latin prose of Lower VIth classical, but he was acutely conscious of the soft weight that

leant against him, and he found his eyes wandering from the sheets he held to the top of Lallie's head just underneath, and thence to her ever busy hands. which held a pale blue silk tie—a tie that was growing in length with the utmost rapidity, for Lallie knitted at express speed, only pausing every now and then to turn a page of her book.

Tony felt the strongest desire to talk, and was quite unreasonably irritated at his guest's complete absorption, which gave him neither lead nor excuse.

The wood fire crackled cheerfully—Lallie had begged some logs from Ford—and Lallie's harp in the corner caught the ruddy gleams on strings and gilded frame.

Tony looked round the large, handsome room with a new interest. Hitherto he had not considered it as any concern of his. It was Miss Foster's domain, to be entered by him only on such occasions as she gave tea to visiting parents. To be sure he had bought all the furniture for it, and each piece, in itself, was good and possessed of qualities that redeemed it from the commonplace. There was one

really beautiful Hepplewhite cabinet, a genuine Sheraton desk and bookcase, and some fine old china; but Lallie was right, the room was stiff, bare, wholly lacking in charm. Not to-night; it seemed neither bare nor stiff to-night. It was full of an atmosphere subtler and sweeter even than that produced by the comfortable clouds of tobacco smoke that floated between Tony Bevan and the girl leaning against his knees. To-night the room radiated a delicious atmosphere of home, and all because a slip of a girl had disarranged the furniture and sat there at his feet looking the very spirit of the domestic hearth.

In grumpy moments, Tony was apt to declare that in all his big house no corner seemed really to belong to him except the writing-table in his study. Among the many admirable qualities of Miss Foster, she did not possess the power of making a man feel comfortable and at his ease in her society. As a rule he was ready enough to admit that this was, perhaps, an additional reason why she filled her post so efficiently. The greatest gossip in Hamchester could not conjecture any matrimonial compli-

cation with Miss Foster, and Tony rejoiced in the serene security engendered by this knowledge. Nevertheless, to-night he was conscious of very distinct enjoyment of, and interest in, his own drawing-room.

How still it was!

No sound save the little click of Lallie's needles as she changed them at the end of a row, and the soft sizzle of the wood fire. Why was she—gregarious, garrulous Lallie—so silent? If only she had insisted on talking he could have laid aside those tiresome proses with a sigh as to the impossibility of work with such a chatterbox in the room. But she was quiet as any mouse, and Tony wanted to talk himself.

"Can you see all right?" he asked at last.

"Perfectly, thank you," and she never turned her head.

Silence again, while Tony smoked and made no attempt to correct papers. Instead, he found himself admiring the straightness of Lallie's parting, and marvelling at the slenderness of her little neck that showed never a bone.

Presently he reflected that it was hardly hospitable to condemn a young and lively girl

to complete silence during her first evening in his house.

Hospitable! It was positively churlish.

Tony pushed the papers on the table a little farther away from him. It was his plain *duty* to talk to Lallie.

"What's that you're knitting?" he asked sociably.

"A tie for Mr. Cripps. Isn't it a pretty colour? Have you finished? How quick you've been! I thought you'd be hours and hours."

"A tie for Cripps!" Tony repeated in tones that betrayed disapproval. "Why in the world should you make a tie for Cripps? You never saw him till this morning."

"Ah, but we made great friends in a very little time," Lallie explained eagerly; "and the old string he was wearing was a terrible show. He can knit ties himself, you know, the clever boy, but he always gives away the ones he knits; and the poor chap's awfully badly off for ties just now. He told me so. And I said I'd make him one for Sundays and high days. I shall probably finish it to-morrow, and he can have it by Monday morning."

"Cripps is a humbug. I'm perfectly sure he has plenty of ties. Don't you be imposed upon, Lallie; don't you give him anything of the kind."

She turned right round and clasped her bare arms round Tony's knees to balance herself.

"Ah, Tony, now," she expostulated, "I must give the boy his little tie that I promised, and him so dull in quarantine and all. Sure a nice pale blue tie will cheer him up and make him think more of himself. A tie to a boy is like a new hat to a girl. There's nothing cheers me up like a new hat when I'm down in the dumps. Now what article of attire most cheers you, Tony?"

"I rather like ties," Tony answered, with cold detachment.

"Then I'll make dozens for you while I'm here," and Lallie set her chin on her clasped hands and looked up at Tony with eyes whose expression reminded him of Val's. "I'll make ties for you and every dear boy in this house, and for Paunch too. By the way, it's a shame to call that man Paunch. He's not fat or bow-windowy. However did he come by such a name?"

"He's not fat now," Tony said judicially, "but he'll be fat long before he's my age unless he takes enormous quantities of exercise; and no one notices a tendency more quickly than boys."

"Is that why you're called Bruiser?" Lallie asked innocently. "Have you a tendency to get mixed up in street rows and to join generally in disorderly conduct?"

"I fancy," answered Tony, "that I got my name rather from my appearance than from any specially rowdy conduct on my part. I was Bruiser Bevan as a boy here, the name followed me up to Oxford, and was waiting for me when I came back here as a master. I was only a fair boxer—too slow and not heavy enough for a heavy weight. Besides I really never cared much about it."

"I think I shall like Paunch," Lallie remarked; "he's earnest and serious, and thinks no end of himself, but he can unbend on occasion."

"Don't you go making him unbend till he refuses to coil up again into his proper shape," Tony said anxiously. "You must be serious,

too, down here, and be always thinking what Aunt Emileen would say."

"Aunt Emileen would approve of Paunch; he is earnestly concerned for the morals of B. House, and I'll help him to raise the tone, till we're so superior no other house can touch us. As for you, Tony, I've discovered already you're a slack old thing, and don't take nearly a keen enough interest in these high matters."

"Of course every one knows that P— that Mr. Johns and Miss Foster really run this house," Tony said dryly; "I'm merely the figure head. Lallie," with a complete change of tone, "why do you wear a bracelet above the elbow? I never saw any other lady wear one there."

"Have you forgotten?" the girl exclaimed. "Look there!" and unclasping the wide gold band she displayed a long discoloured, jagged scar on her white arm. "That's where the mare 'Loree' bit me when I was ten. Don't you remember 'Loree'? Perhaps you weren't with us that autumn. We called her after the poem, 'Loraine, Loraine, Loree,' because she had such a fiendish temper. But she was a

great beauty, and a wonderful jumper, and Dad thought he would hunt her that winter, in spite of her temper, though he was a bit too heavy for her; but they were all afraid of her at the stables, and declared she'd be the death of somebody. Funnily enough she never showed temper to me, and I used to take her sugar and apples and go in and out of the stable, and she never showed a sign of ill-temper while I was there, but Dad would never let me mount her. Then one day she'd just come in from exercising, and I went out to the yard with her apple for her. Rooney called to me: 'Don't you come near her, Miss Lallie! It's the very devil himself is in her to-day;' but I laughed, like the silly little girl I was, and said, 'It's you, Rooney, who can't manage her; I wish they'd let me take her out to exercise, it's a light hand she wants.' I went up to her to give her the apple, and she swung round and caught hold of my arm with her long teeth, and broke it there and then—and Dad shot her that afternoon. Oh, you *must* remember, Tony!"

"I think I do remember something about it, but you know you were always being bit-

ten by something, or thrown by something else——"

"I never was *thrown* but once," Lallie exclaimed indignantly. "If your horse rolls in a ditch it's not fair for any one to say you're thrown; but you, Tony, I suppose, keep count of the times you stick on, not the times you come off."

"Well, you were always in the wars, anyhow, so that perhaps the accidents, being so numerous, impressed me less than they ought to have done. But that was a horrid thing. Still, you know, I think the scar is less noticeable than the bracelet."

"Oh, the bracelet's Dad's affair. He can't bear to see anything ugly; and when I had my first proper evening frock he gave me this, and bade me wear it always when I had short sleeves; and it makes a topic of conversation with my partners at dances, and they're always very shocked and sorry, and feel kindly to me at once."

Lallie snapped the bracelet on her arm again, and smiled up confidingly at Tony, who continued to smoke in silence.

"I've admired you sufficiently," said Lallie. "I will now devote my attention to the dear Cripps' tie," and she turned round on the stool, once more leant her back against Tony's knees, and the busy needles went to click again.

"I'd finish those papers if I were you," she suggested, "and then we can talk, or play picquet, or I'll sing to you, whichever you prefer."

"You," said Tony sedately, "must go to bed almost directly."

"Which means that you can't work in this room, and that I worry you, poor dear; but I'll go, and I'll be down to breakfast to-morrow and pour out your coffee for you. I know just how you like it—don't I?"

Lallie rose from her stool, looking, as she always contrived to do, far taller than she really was, in her clinging green draperies.

"You'll let me give tea to some boys to-morrow, won't you? Paddy said you always have chaps to tea in the drawing-room on Sundays, and precious dull it is with Miss Foster; but to-morrow it won't be dull—you just see how I'll entertain them. I think I'd

like the nice boys who were dining with you when I came. They'll do for a start."

"We'll see what can be done," said Tony, with unaccountable meekness. "Good-night, my child; sleep well."

He held the door open for her, and she passed out, only pausing on the threshold to remark:

"There! I've never attempted to kiss you; I'll get quite used to it soon!"

CHAPTER VI

FOR five terms, in fact ever since Miss Foster had been housekeeper at B. House, she had never left that house during term time for a single night. And on her arrival at Hamchester station on Tuesday afternoon, having been away from the previous Friday, she almost ran down the long platform to collect her luggage, hustled her porter, nor rested a moment till she had seized upon the first available cab to take to her destination.

After years of generally unsuccessful ventures in various directions, Miss Foster had at last found a post entirely after her own heart, and the whole of her by no means inconsiderable energy was absorbed by B. House. She declared that it gave her scope. She was convinced that she, and she alone, "ran" B. House. She regarded Tony merely as an amiable figure-head. She liked him; she knew him to be honourable and well-meaning, and had

found him generous in his business relations, and of course he was necessary, as otherwise she, herself, might not have been there; nevertheless, in her heart of hearts she was convinced that she, and she alone, kept the machinery of B. House in working order. Tony was far too easy-going, far too easily imposed upon. She distrusted the matron, and for Mr. Johns she felt an irritated sort of contempt, which she was at small pains to conceal: did not this misguided young man dare to entertain the incredibly conceited notion that *he* ran B. House? This in itself was more than enough to condemn him in Miss Foster's eyes.

A handsome woman, tall, plump, fresh-coloured, she made no attempt to look younger than her forty-nine years. She wore her plentiful grey hair dressed high over a cushion, well waved and beautifully arranged; no one ever saw Miss Foster with an untidy head. Her hats were always large and imposing, and occasionally becoming; her dresses rich, rustling, sober in colour, and thoroughly well made.

"All must have gone smoothly in my absence," she thought complacently as she sat in

the jolting cab. "Mr. Bevan faithfully promised that if there was illness of any kind he would telegraph at once. Cripps can't have got the mumps. He probably won't get it, and if he does it can't spread as he was quarantined at once. I hope Matron has been strict about the quarantine. I always mistrust these hospital-trained people when left to themselves; one has to be ever on the watch. Ah, here we are!"

Before Miss Foster could descend from the cab Ford appeared to help her with her smaller baggage. Ford looked particularly trim and smiling that afternoon in a nice new muslin apron and cap.

"All well, Ford?" Miss Foster remarked genially, without waiting for an answer. "You may bring tea at once to the drawing-room; I'll have it before I go upstairs."

She crossed the hall and opened the drawing-room door, but she did not enter the room. Instead she stood transfixed upon the threshold and sniffed dubiously.

The windows were open according to her instructions whenever the room was untenanted.

Notwithstanding this, there was a very strong smell of violets. To most people this is an agreeable odour, but Miss Foster mistrusted the presence of violets at all. Why should there be violets in her drawing-room during her absence?

A few steps farther revealed to her astonished gaze that the room was not as she had left it. The furniture had been changed as to position, disarranged, increased!

Miss Foster was not fond of music, and she beheld with positive dismay that a grand piano, open, with long lid slanted upwards, was placed athwart the inner wall. A huge harp stood just behind it, and an unfamiliar bulging green silk bag was flung on the Chesterfield, where it sprawled in flagrant publicity. The overpowering scent of violets was easily traceable to a large china bowl, full of that modest flower, which stood on a little table, moved from its accustomed place against the wall close to a big chair by the fireplace. Moreover, on that table, cheek by jowl with the violets, lay a tin of "Player's Navy Cut," a common box of kitchen matches, an ash-tray,

and a very brown meershaum pipe. Miss Foster passed her hand over her eyes to make sure that these things were not an hallucination, and at that moment Ford came in, bearing tea.

"What on earth is the meaning of all this, Ford?" poor Miss Foster exclaimed, waving her hand in the direction of the piano.

"It's been got for Miss Clonmell, 'm. This morning the men brought the piano; she brought 'er 'arp with her."

"*Who* brought a harp?" Miss Foster cried irritably, as though she could hardly believe her ears. "Ford, what *are* you talking about?"

"Miss Clonmell, miss—the young lady as have come to live here."

"A young lady! To live here! But who is she, and when did she come, and why have I been told nothing about it?"

"She's sister to the Mr. Clonmell what was here last term, 'm, and she came unexpected like on Friday evening, while Mr. Bevan was at dinner. He didn't expect her any more than you, miss."

"But what in the world has she come for? She can't stay here. Where is she?"

"I don't exactly know 'm," Ford answered, with demure enjoyment of the situation. "Mrs. Wentworth came directly after luncheon, 'm, and took her out. Miss Clonmell said as I was to ask you not to wait tea if you came before she got back, as she'll probably have hers with Mrs. Wentworth."

"Wait tea!" Miss Foster repeated, in tones that expressed volumes of determination to do nothing of the kind. "This is the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of. What is she like?"

"Oh, a very nice young lady, 'm. No one could *'elp* liking 'er. The 'ouse seems a different place since she come, so much livelier; and she sings and plays something beautiful——"

"I should think it does seem a different place," Miss Foster remarked grimly; "that horrible harp makes my drawing-room look like the deck of a penny steamer. It can't stay here, that's certain. However, I'll have tea now—I need it. Whenever Mr. Bevan comes in, Ford, ask him to be good enough to speak to me at once."

Miss Foster sat in her accustomed chair and made tea. The tea was good and refreshing, but although she had purposely turned her back to the obnoxious musical instruments she felt uncomfortably conscious of their presence. There they were like a draught blowing down her back. A harp, too! In Miss Foster's mind harps were associated mainly with mendicity and the bars of public-houses. Not that she had the smallest personal knowledge of such objectionable places; but she was certain that the horrid people who frequented them played and listened to the harp. It was probably their favourite instrument, and it was more likely that during their disreputable orgies they even danced to its throbbing strains.

Miss Foster, who had never been out of her own country, was one of those persons who inevitably associate Scotland with plaids and porridge, and Ireland with pigs and shillelaghs.

"An unsatisfactory, ungrateful, untrustworthy race, the Irish," she reflected; "and if the sister is half as troublesome as the brother—and being a girl she is certain to be ten times more so; I detest girls—the pros-

pect is far from pleasing. What I cannot understand is the underhand behaviour of Mr. Bevan. This girl can't have dropped from the clouds, and I consider it most ungentlemanly of him not to have given me some warning. He might at least have written to tell me of her arrival, and I would have come back yesterday. However, I don't fancy her visit will be a very long one now that I have come back."

She took a vigorous bite out of her piece of bread and butter, and stirred her tea with a determination that boded ill for the interloper. Yet, resolute woman as she was, she still smelt the violets and was aware of the grand piano in the background.

She had just finished her second cup of tea when Tony came in.

"Ah, Miss Foster, it's nice to see you back again. I hope the wedding went off well—you had a lovely day. I'm just in time to beg for a cup of tea. I suppose Ford has told you of the addition to our party; I didn't write, as you were away for such a brief holiday; it seemed too bad to bother you."

Somehow Miss Foster found it impossible to say all the bitter things to Tony that she had been preparing. He was so friendly, so kind, so interested in all her doings. Besides, he explained at once how Lallie's sudden appearance had been as great a surprise to him as to Miss Foster, and she was fain to believe him; but none the less did she determine that the said visit should be brief as unexpected.

Tony took it for granted she would do her best for the girl. So she would. It would certainly be best for the girl and for B. House that the girl's visit should not be unduly prolonged. When Tony left the drawing-room that afternoon Miss Foster was more than ever persuaded that he badly needed some one to stand between him and those who took advantage of his good nature, and she there and then valiantly resolved that, so far as in her lay, she would act as that buffer. She was still glowing at the prospect of the friction such fortitude on her part would assuredly entail when Tony came back into the room. He might almost be said to have crept back, so shamefaced was his appearance.

"I fear that I have left some of my belongings in here," he mumbled apologetically. "I must have put them down when I came in to speak to Lallie, after lunch—and forgotten them."

Oh, mendacious Tony! when he knew perfectly well that those "belongings" had been left on that table ever since Lallie's second evening in B. House, and he had smoked there ruthlessly every evening since.

"It doesn't matter in the least," Miss Ford said graciously; "one couldn't smell even tobacco with these overpowering flowers. I really must ask Ford to throw them out; they are enough to give us all hay-fever."

Tony fled.

CHAPTER VII

AN hour later Tony sat at his study table offering sacrifices propitiatory to parental anxiety amid clouds of smoke, with a pile of unanswered letters at his elbow.

Lallie peeped in.

"Has she come, Tony?" she whispered.

"She has," he remarked briefly, whereupon Lallie vanished again, with a muttered exclamation.

In the passage she met Mr. Johns on his way to take prep.; she seized him by the arm, whispering beseechingly:

"Come with me to the drawing-room just for a minute, there's a dear kind man. I'm petrified with terror, and Tony's busy. Don't leave me to go in all by myself."

"Certainly not," Mr. Johns replied reassuringly; "I can't stay, I'm afraid, but I'll come into the drawing-room with you with pleasure. If it's the dark you're afraid of, and it soon gets

dark now, I'll turn on the light; it's just inside the door."

Lallie gave a smothered laugh, but nevertheless she kept a tight hold of Mr. Johns till he had opened the drawing-room door and turned on the light. Then she drew her hand from his arm and sailed into the room with her head in the air. The room was untenanted.

"She's not here at all," Lallie said blankly; then to the somewhat flustered young master who had followed her in: "I'll not detain you further, Mr. Johns," she remarked airily; "I know you are much occupied. It was kind of you to show me the way."

Somewhat huffed at this abrupt dismissal after so effusive a greeting, Mr. Johns swung round hastily, only to cannon with considerable violence against Miss Foster, who, unheard by him, had just entered the room. Lallie stood magisterially upon the hearthrug while they disentangled themselves, and Mr. Johns muttered apologies which were loftily ignored by the lady.

Miss Foster was intensely annoyed. No one appears to advantage who has just been vig-

orously humped into by an International forward; and although Miss Foster's ample form was calculated both to sustain and repel a considerable impact, she was distinctly ruffled.

Mr. Johns almost banged the door behind him.

"I hope he didn't hurt you, the clumsy fellow," exclaimed Lallie, in sweetly sympathetic tones, as she came forward with outstretched hand. "I must introduce myself, dear Miss Foster, and apologise for invading B. House in your absence."

"I suppose you are but a bird of passage," Miss Foster remarked, when she had given Lallie's hand a limp and chilly shake.

"That depends," said Lallie gaily, "whether you're all very good to me or not. If I like it, I may stay till Dad comes back from India. He likes me to be with Tony."

"I wonder," Miss Foster said thoughtfully, when she had seated herself, "whether your father has fully considered Mr. Bevan's many responsibilities. A house like this—" Miss Foster paused.

"It seems a comfortable house," Lallie suggested helpfully, "though 'tis a bit cold. Shall I set a match to the fire?" and Lallie flew to the little table—but the matches were gone.

"Pray don't," Miss Foster exclaimed, "I never start fires before the first of October."

"But if it's cold?" Lallie expostulated.

"That, Miss Clonmell, is my invariable rule."

"But it might be warm on the first of October."

"If it is warm on the first of October I shall certainly not have a fire."

"But we've *had* a fire every night since I came."

"I thought the room smelt rather stuffy," Miss Foster said coldly. "Won't you sit down, Miss Clonmell? You look so uncomfortable standing there."

Lallie sat down obediently, and unconsciously folded her hands in the devout attitude in which she had been wont to listen to the discourses of the Mother Superior in her convent.

"It would be well," Miss Foster continued, in a head voice, "if, before we go any farther, I explain to you how rigid—necessarily rigid—

rules must be in a house of this description. It will save trouble and futile argument afterwards. You must see, yourself, that the arrangements in a College boarding-house containing fifty boys and over a dozen servants can't chop and change; the ordinary routine can't be relaxed as in an ordinary private house—though in the best managed private houses things are almost equally regular."

"But why should people be colder in a College house than in any other sort, if they can afford a fire?" Lallie persisted. "Tony *liked* the fire."

"I never argue," Miss Foster observed, with superior finality; "we will change the subject. How is your brother getting on at Woolwich? I hope he is settling down well."

"I don't know about 'settling,' Miss Foster, we're not a very settled family, but he's well and happy, and the dearest boy. Didn't you think him a dear boy, and isn't he good to look at?"

"From what I remember of your brother he was quite good-looking—fair, wasn't he? You are not in the least like him."

"No, indeed, more's the pity," Lallie said simply. "He is the image of Dad. You've met my father, I think, Miss Foster?"

"I believe your father stayed a night here some time last winter, but I don't remember him very distinctly. We see so many parents, you know, and it's hard to keep them separate in one's mind unless they have very definite qualities, or are distinguished people."

"Most people think Dad *is* very distinguished," said Lallie, much incensed at the implied slight upon her father; "but I suppose he appeals most to brilliant people like himself. May I have my work-bag, Miss Foster? I think you are sitting on it, and I may as well get on with Tony's tie as sit here doing nothing. Thank you; I hope no needle has run into you."

Silence fell upon the twain: a fighting silence, charged with unrest.

Dinner that night was not exactly a hilarious meal. Mr. Johns still smarted under a sense of injury at the trick he considered Lallie had played him. He held her responsible for his collision with Miss Foster, and he came to table determined not to address a single word to her

till she should apologise. All the time he was mentally rehearsing that apology and the form it should take. In some solitude—place not yet specified—she would ask him what she had done to offend him. Reluctantly he would allow her to drag from him the real cause of his aloofness, and through the veil of his reticence she would perceive the enormity of her offence —veils have an enlarging effect. Being really good at heart and full of generous impulses —he was certain of Lallie's generosity—she would frankly apologise, and he would, as frankly, refuse to allow her to do so. Mr. Johns saw himself, muscular, large, and magnanimous, in the very flower of his young English manhood—gently and imperceptibly raising little Lallie's moral tone until her soul should reach the altitude upon which it could meet his on equal terms. After that, who knows what might happen? And it was dinner time.

At table, however, he couldn't harden his heart against Lallie, who sat opposite in a high white blouse that made her look like a schoolgirl. Her eyelids were pink; so was her nose

with its confiding tip; and she never once looked across at Mr. Johns.

Miss Foster *would* discuss the dates of various quarantines, and the preventative measures that should be taken if any of the usual infectious diseases invaded the other houses. Tony tried in vain to head her off to other topics. By the time they had reached the contagious, or non-contagious nature of tonsilitis, Lallie began to look about her. From time to time she caught Tony's eyes, and her own were so merry and well amused that Tony, himself, began to see another side to the germ question, which as a rule bored him to extinction. Mr. Johns found himself trying to intercept some of Lallie's glances, but without success; and when the meal came to an end he had assuredly not addressed a single remark to Lallie, but it was from lack of opportunity and not because he was any longer offended. How could one be offended with an irresponsible creature whose dimples were so bewitching?

Tony retired to his study; Mr. Johns went back to the boys; and Lallie, who longed to go with Tony but didn't dare, meekly followed

Miss Foster into the drawing-room. Tony was troubled about Lallie. The child look pinched and low-spirited, he thought, and she was such a good child. She had tried so hard, so kind-hearted Tony assured himself, to fall in with their ways, to keep rules and regulations that were all strange to her. He wished he could have her in here with him, but he supposed it wouldn't do; Miss Foster might be offended. She was such a quiet little mouse—it was pleasant to work by the fire with her leaning against his knees, with one of those everlasting ties in her hands. By Jove! it was a cold night; he'd light his fire. Poor little Lallie! would Miss Foster be friendly and motherly? He hoped to goodness she wouldn't talk any more about illnesses; he felt rather as though he were going to have mumps himself. Tony pressed his neck on both sides anxiously. The wood sparkled and crackled, he drew his chair up to the fire and lit his pipe.

"You must excuse me, Miss Clonmell," said Miss Foster, when they reached the drawing-room; "I have many things to see to upstairs. In a house like this it is impossible to devote

one's whole evening to social intercourse. I fear I must leave you for half an hour or so."

"Of course," Lallie said solemnly, not quite knowing why. "Please, Miss Foster, would it disturb any of the children—the boys, I mean —if I play the piano while you're gone?"

"The boys' part of the house is quite separate; you *may* disturb Mr. Bevan, who is usually busy at this time—but——"

"Oh, I shan't disturb Tony; he'll probably leave his door open to hear me; he loves music."

"He has not, hitherto, made any parade of his partiality," Miss Foster said coldly, and left the room, shutting the door carefully after her.

Lallie flew across to the door and opened it wide, gazing after Miss Foster's portly form ascending the staircase.

"In a house like 'this,'" said Lallie to herself, and made a face, "St. Bridget herself would lose patience, and I very much fear there's more than a spice of the devil in me. Anyway, I'm not going to freeze for twenty Miss Fosters; I'll get a cloak to cover me."

She ran upstairs and reappeared clad in a wonderful theatre coat of rose-coloured satin,

embroidered in silver, a most incongruous garment considering the severe simplicity of her frock, but it appeared to give her great satisfaction; and again leaving the door wide open she seated herself "with an air" at the piano, and began to sing.

It was surprising that so small and slight a creature as Lallie could have such a big voice —a rich, carrying *mezzo soprano* voice; the sort of voice usually associated with the full-bosomed, substantially built women that one encounters on concert platforms or in grand opera.

Portali, the great singing-master in Paris to whom her father had taken her when she was seventeen, explained it thus:

"She sings as a bird sings, but she would never make a public singer. She hasn't the physique, she hasn't the industry; above all, she hasn't the temperament; but she can sing now as no amount of training could ever make her. Give her good lessons—occasionally—but only the best; never let any provincial teacher come near her. If she ever has a bad illness she'll probably lose her voice altogether,

but if she only sings for pleasure—for her own, and yours, and that of the fortunate people thrown with her, never as a business—she may keep it till she is quite an old woman. Let her choose her own songs—Folk songs are what she can sing—but let her sing what she pleases; she will never go wrong. Let her keep her wild-bird voice; don't try to tame or train it too much."

Lallie began to sing very softly "Synnöve's Lied"—the andante that is sung as if humming to one's self; then suddenly she let her voice go. "Oh to remember the happy hours!" Right through the house it rang, passionate, pathetic, pleading.

Tony leapt to his feet and opened his study door; at the same instant he heard some one prop open the swing door that shut off the study passage from his part of the house, and down the long corridor every door was opened.

"Our world was bounded by the garden trees,
Then came the churchyard and the river."

The big, beautiful voice died down, and once more came the quaint humming refrain.

Again — musical, intensely melancholy — the voice rang out.

> "But now the garden is white with snow,
> At night I wait, I stand and shiver,"

sang Lallie most realistically, for the drawing-room really was rather cold.

> "The place is frosty, the cold winds blow,
> Oh love, my love, but you come never."

Lallie sang in English, for she could not speak Norwegian, and every word was clearly enunciated and distinct; the soft humming refrain followed, and died away into silence.

"Heavens!" thought Tony, "the child is homesick alone in there with Miss Foster; she sounds cold too—this is dreadful!"

He hurried to the drawing-room, expecting to find Lallie in the tearful state her pathetic voice had indicated.

"I thought that would bring you," Lallie remarked complacently. "Come here, Tony, and admire my theatre coat Dad brought me from Paris."

Tony stood where he was, staring at the gorgeous little figure seated perkily on the piano

stool; at the big cheerless room, with one electric light burning in dismal prominence over the piano; at the black and chilly hearth.

"Why in the name of all that's idiotic haven't you got a fire?" he asked angrily.

"In this house," Lallie replied, in Miss Foster's very tones, "we never have fires till the first of October."

Poor Tony looked very miserable.

"I am so sorry," he said helplessly; "you'd better come and sit in my study. I have a fire."

"It's I who ought to be sorry, Tony, worrying you like this. It was horrid of me to tell tales. No, I won't come and sit in your study, for that would only make her hate me the more. I'm not a bit cold in my beautiful coat, and I'll go on making music quite happily. Run away back to your little exercise books."

"Try not to take a dislike to Miss Foster at the very first, Lallie," Tony pleaded. "She's a good sort really; and perhaps I ought to have written to tell her you had come."

"It would have been better to break it to her gently," Lallie responded drily.

Tony crossed the room slowly, pausing on the threshold.

"I fear I must ask you to keep the door shut; the boys heard you singing, and instantly every study door was opened."

"Ah, the dears!" cried Lallie delighted. "Do let me have them all in, and I'll sing them something they'd really like."

Tony shook his head.

"They must do their work, and I must do mine. Mind, you are to come into the study if you are cold."

As Tony crossed the hall even the shut door could not drown the cheerful strains of that most jubilant of jigs, "Rory O'More," and he felt a wild impulse to dance a *pas seul* there and then. However, he sternly fastened the swing door, shut himself into his study, and tried to forget the brilliant little rose-and-silver figure with the wistful Greuze face. Over his mantelpiece hung an engraving of "*La cruche cassée*," bought some years ago because of its likeness to Lallie. He shook his head at it now, turned his back upon it, and sat down at his table. Val, who liked music, went to the door and

whined to get out, but Tony unsympathetically bade him get into his basket again, and gave his own attention to the bundles of white paper that Lallie had impertinently dubbed "little exercise books."

When Miss Foster returned Lallie was singing "All round my hat I will wear a green garland," and accompanying herself upon the harp. She finished the song and then went and sat beside Miss Foster on the sofa.

"You have a very strong voice, Miss Clonmell," Miss Foster remarked, gazing with astonished disfavour at the rose-and-silver garment.

"So I've always been told," said Lallie. "You see it has never been strained."

"Did you say trained or strained?"

Lallie laughed.

"Oh, it's plenty of training it's had, but perhaps I haven't profited as much as I might have done. Are you fond of music, Miss Foster?"

"I can't say that I am. I dislike every sort of loud music, and all stringed instruments seem to me so very thrummy."

To this Lallie made no reply, but took her roll of lace out of her bag and began to work

in perfect silence. Miss Foster picked up the *Spectator* and tried to read it, but could not concentrate her attention. Against her will she was forced to glance from time to time at the quiet figure beside her; at the deft white hands that moved so swiftly and silently; at the beautiful work that grew so fast beneath their ministrations. Like Tony, Lallie's silence irritated her. If only the girl had chattered she would have had a grievance.

"You were out with Mrs. Wentworth this afternoon, I think you said?" Miss Foster remarked at last.

"Yes, Miss Foster; she took me to see Pris and Prue at their dancing. Oh, it was lovely! Pris is just like a big soft india-rubber ball, and bounds up and down in perfect time, and looks the incarnation of gleeful enjoyment. And then Mrs. Wentworth insisted on my going back to tea with her, for they were arranging about the Musical Society, and she thought I might help. The organist is a nice man! That's how it was I couldn't be here to welcome you."

"The practises are a great nuisance," Miss

Foster said. "The boys have so much to do, it really is not fair to make them practise in their scanty playtime."

"But music's good for them," argued Lallie; "and it's not a mental strain."

"Of that I am by no means sure. If you will excuse me, Miss Clonmell, I think I will retire, for I've had rather a tiring day."

Miss Foster rose, Lallie folded her work neatly and put it in her bag. She went and shut the piano and came back and shook hands with her hostess.

"Good-night, Miss Foster. I may be a minute after you, for I promised Mr. Bevan I'd go and say good-night to him in the study;" and before Miss Foster could recover from her amazement at this audacious statement Lallie had vanished.

"She's worse than anything I ever dreamt of," poor Miss Foster lamented to herself; "and I fear she's a fixture for the present; anyway, we shall see."

CHAPTER VIII

AS Lallie was late for breakfast Tony only saw her for a few minutes before he had to go to College. He did not get back to the house again till nearly lunch time, when he met her at the front door, radiant, smiling, her arms full of books.

"See, Tony!" she exclaimed joyously. "I've been into the town—such a pretty town it is too, with a band playing in the promenade and all. And I found a library, and I've paid my subscription for three months; three volumes at a time; and I've chosen three books, and here they are!"

Tony followed her into the hall and Lallie held up the books, backs outwards, for his inspection.

"How did you choose them?" he asked.

"Well, I chose this one because there was such a pretty lady in the front, and I liked the cover. And I chose this one because I've read

other books by the same author, and liked them. And I chose this one because the very nice lady at the library pressed it upon me and said it was 'being very much read.'"

"Only one good reason, Lallie, out of the three. I'm afraid that pretty cover, with the pretty lady inside, is misleading. I, in my character of chaperon——"

"As Uncle Emileen, you mean, Tony?"

"Exactly so. I, in my character of Uncle Emileen, must veto that one, though I haven't read it myself. I'm pretty sure your father wouldn't like it."

"I'm quite sure he wouldn't, if you say so. He's awfully particular, is Dad; but he's particular in a funny sort of way. He'll let me read things that would make the hair of the entire Emileen family stand straight on end—if only they are sincere and well written; and then again, he falls foul of wishy-washy novels that Aunt Emileen would consider quite harmless."

"I don't think he would consider this either well-written or sincere, so you'd better give it to me."

"Dad says 'tis women mostly who write the dirty books—what a pity! But I think he must be wrong, don't you, Tony?"

Tony shook his head mournfully.

"A great pity," he repeated.

"I expect they do it just for the fun of shocking people. I like doing that myself."

"I've no doubt of it. All the same, I hope you'll choose some other method of scandalising society; and you'd better hand that particular volume over to me."

"And here have I walked all the way up from the town, fondly clasping that pernicious volume—Aunt Emileen's phrase, not mine—and lots of people stared hard at me, and I thought it was my nice new hat they were admiring. Here, take it, Tony, and you can come with me to return it, and then they'll think I got it for you, you old sinner."

Tony glanced nervously around lest there should be any eavesdropper to hear him called an "old sinner"; but the doors were all shut and the hall empty.

"Certainly I'll come with you to-morrow; I couldn't possibly come to-day, I was so busy.

Why are you always in such a hurry, Lallie? I subscribe to that library; no one ever gets out any books except Miss Foster; and there you go paying another subscription. What waste! And why did you go by yourself?"

"And who was there to go with, pray? P—Mr. Johns was in College. You were in College. I don't know where Mrs. Wentworth was, but anyway I didn't meet her."

"What about Miss Foster?"

"Miss Foster went out while I was practising, and when she came in, I went out. Sort of 'Box and Cox,' you know."

"Try and go with Miss Foster to-morrow, Lallie, it would be so much better."

Lallie had already started to go upstairs; she paused about six steps up and leant over the banisters to look at Tony, exclaiming reproachfully:

"But you promised you'd go with me yourself to-morrow!"

"So I will, but other days—remember."

Lallie went up three more steps, and again paused and looked down.

"For a dear, kind, nice, middle-aged man,

Tony, you're rather obtuse," she said. And with this cryptic speech she ran up the whole flight of stairs and vanished from his sight.

What could the child mean?

Lallie had made up her mind overnight that she would *not* bother Tony with any complaints about Miss Foster, so she did not tell him that directly after breakfast that lady had suggested to her that she should practise "while I am out of the house." Nor had Miss Foster made any suggestion that Lallie should accompany her during her morning's shopping. When Miss Foster came in, Lallie went out; and having in the meantime come to the conclusion that she must find amusement for herself and in no way depend upon her hostess, she found her way into the town and to the library.

By the end of a week Miss Foster had made it abundantly clear to every one concerned, except the busy and optimistic master of the house, that she felt no desire whatever for the society of Lallie Clonmell.

By mutual consent they kept out of each other's way as far as was possible. Miss Fos-

ter took every opportunity of letting Lallie see that she had no intention of acting the part of Aunt Emileen towards her; and whatever Tony might be, Lallie was not obtuse. Subtly, but none the less unmistakably, did Miss Foster impress upon her that to be the chaperon of stray young ladies did not come within the scope of the duties which she had undertaken to fulfil at B. House. She never offered to take the girl anywhere except to chapel or to the football field, where it was practically impossible that they should go separately. Moreover, Miss Foster considered it a real grievance that during the services in chapel, Lallie persisted in singing psalms, canticles, and hymns with her usual *brio* and enthusiasm; and the wonderfully sweet, full voice caused many upward glances at the gallery reserved for the masters' families.

Lallie had philosophically determined to make the best of a difficult situation; but like that friend of Dr. Johnson, who "would have been a philosopher but that cheerfulness kept breaking in," so, in her case, cheerfulness made extraordinarily frequent irruptions in the shape

of the older boys and younger masters to an extent that sometimes threatened to be indecorously hilarious.

Not once had Miss Foster invited Lallie to accompany her when she went shopping in the morning. In fact, her daily suggestion after breakfast that her guest should "get her practising over before lunch" had become a sort of ritual. Thus it came about that Lallie took to going out by herself between twelve and one, the fashionable hour for promenading in Hamchester; and invariably her steps were bent towards the very promenade she had so admired on her first visit to the library.

Tony, who generally played fives or coached football teams after morning school until lunch time, was under the impression that she was safe in Miss Foster's care; nor had he the remotest idea that Fitzroy Clonmell's cherished only daughter, who had never in her life before walked unattended in the streets of a town, tripped off alone every morning to sun herself in the famous Hamchester promenade, where the band plays daily and the idle and well-

dressed inhabitants walk up and down, gossip, or flirt as best pleases them.

The promenade at Hamchester is a long, straight street; very wide, possessed of a really fine avenue of trees, with shops on one side, and on the other public gardens and a terrace of tall Georgian dwelling-houses. The library made an excellent object for Lallie's daily walk, and if she reached the promenade unattended, she was not long permitted to stroll along in mournful solitude. Before she had been three weeks in Hamchester she knew every prefect in the whole alphabet of College houses, and for prefects, the promenade was not out of bounds.

The gallant Cripps, no longer in quarantine, often found his way thither, to the despair of the fives-playing community. Berry, head prefect of B. House, had strained a muscle in his shoulder, and was off games for the time being, and he also fell in with Lallie with surprising frequency; and if it so happened that no boys she knew were "down town" between twelve and one, "young Nick" was almost certain to fly into town on a bicycle, which he recklessly

left outside a shop while he walked up and down, and discussed the Celtic Renaissance or more frivolous topics with this sweet-voiced, frank, and friendly Irish maid.

From the very beginning Mrs. Wentworth had done her best for Lallie in the way of asking her to lunch and to tea, but she had a houseful of visitors during the girl's first weeks under Tony Bevan's roof, and had really very little time for outsiders. She had gauged pretty accurately Miss Foster's mental attitude towards Lallie; but when Miss Foster declared to her that she "accepted no responsibility whatever with regard to Miss Clonmell," little Mrs. Wentworth thought that this was only "Miss Foster's way"; and never dreamt that the lady could or would evade a relationship towards her young guest that seemed natural and inevitable.

Therefore it came upon Mrs. Wentworth with quite a shock when three mornings running in succession, while doing the ever-necessary shopping, she came upon Lallie leisurely strolling up and down the promenade, a tall youth on either side of her, all three manifestly with no sort of object in their stroll except the soci-

ety of one another; and wherever Lallie was, "cheerfulness kept breaking in": in this case the attendant swains laughed with a heartiness and vigour that caused most passers-by to regard the trio attentively. Small and upright; clad in an admirably fitting suit of Lincoln green—she was very fond of green—with trim short skirt that liberally displayed her slim ankles and very pretty feet, she would have been noticeable even without her hilarious escort; and Mrs. Wentworth, whose motherliness in no way stopped short at Pris and Prue, acted promptly and without hesitation.

From the steps of a shop she watched the gay green figure and attendant swains pass, walk to the end of the avenue, turn and come back again, when Mrs. Wentworth descended into the arena and met Lallie face to face.

"Lallie, how fortunate! You are the very person I most wanted at this moment. How do you do, Mr. Berry! I hope your shoulder is less painful? Good morning, Mr. Cripps. Lallie, do come with me and help me to choose linen for the children's smocks. You have such a good eye for colour."

Lallie dismissed her companions with a cheerfully decided "Don't wait for me, either of you; I'll be ages. And I want to walk home with Mrs. Wentworth."

The two ladies vanished into a shop, and Cripps and Berry were left outside, looking rather foolish and disconsolate.

"D'you think she cut in on purpose?" asked Cripps.

"Highly probable," said Berry. "I thought this sort of game was a bit too hot to last. I confess I've often wondered Germs or old Bruiser didn't put a stop to it." "Germs" was Miss Foster's nickname amongst the boys.

"Germs hates her; any one can see that."

"All the more reason for her to interfere on every possible occasion, I should have thought."

"My dear chap," said Berry in superior tones, "you only perceive the obvious. I confess I can't make out Germs. She's anxious enough to interfere as a rule, but about Miss Clonmell, I'm hanged if I can see what she's playing at. It's a deep game, anyhow. She'd give her eyes to get rid of her; I'd stake my oath on that. Poor little girl! It must be jolly dull shut up

all day with old Germs. However, we'll continue to do our best for her, anyhow."

"I jolly well shall," said Cripps, and he said it with the air of one who registers a solemn vow.

Mrs. Wentworth and Lallie chose the linen for the smocks: light blue, the colour of her eyes, for Pris, dark blue for Prue; and Lallie's favourite green for Punch. She insisted on being allowed to make the one for Punch herself, and was so keenly interested and absorbed by the whole affair that Mrs. Wentworth found it very hard to broach the subject she had most at heart. The girl was so frankly affectionate, so manifestly delighted to be with her friend again, that the kindly lady suffered pangs of self-reproach that she had not made time somehow to see more of her. In considering young people generally, Mrs. Wentworth was in the habit of saying to herself, "Suppose it were Pris or Prue"; and it was marvellous how lenient in her judgment this supposition always made her.

As they left the town behind them and reached the quiet road leading to B. House, she took the bull by the horns, saying:

"Lallie, dear, do you think your father would like you to walk up and down the promenade all alone at the very busiest time?"

"But I'm hardly ever alone, dear Mrs. Wentworth. I may say never. I always meet one or two of the boys or somebody, and we walk up and down together."

Lallie so evidently considered her explanation entirely satisfactory, and turned a face of such guileless innocence and affection towards her mentor, that Mrs. Wentworth found it difficult to go on with her sermon. However, she steeled her heart and continued:

"That's just it, my dear; I fear he wouldn't like it at all."

"Not like me walking with the boys? Oh, you're really quite wrong there; he *meant* me to be friends with the boys, that's why he sent me to Tony. He thinks all the world of the boys, and I agree with him; such a dear nice set they are. Don't you think so yourself, Mrs. Wentworth?"

"I do, I do, indeed," Mrs. Wentworth heartily assented; "but—the promenade of a large town is not quite the proper place for you to

meet the boys, and I am sure that there your father would agree with me."

"Would you rather I walked with them in the country roads? I'm quite willing. I'm by no means wedded to the promenade. The trombone in the band played rather out of tune to-day, and it jarred me dreadfully. We'll go into the country next time."

"No, no, that wouldn't do at all. Lallie, I'm afraid—I'm very much afraid—that you oughtn't to walk about with the boys at all unless I or Miss Foster or Mr. Bevan can be with you."

"Dear Mrs. Wentworth, would you rather I went about with the young masters?" Lallie asked sweetly. "They've really got more time, and I like them nearly as well. I'll tell one of them to come country walks with me if you prefer it."

"Certainly not," Mrs. Wentworth said decidedly. "You mustn't do that on any account——"

"Then where am I to walk?" Lallie interrupted piteously. "Round and round the College field? And it's often so wet. I must get some exercise."

"Of course you must," Mrs. Wentworth concurred heartily. "You must come out with me; and sometimes, perhaps, you'll take out the children: they love you so dearly. But what you must *not* do—I really mean it—is to walk up and down that promenade as you were doing to-day"—Mrs. Wentworth said nothing about the other days—"because, rightly, or wrongly, the nicest girls here don't do it; and as you are so very nice I can't let you. Lallie I don't want to be interfering and tiresome, but don't you think it would look better—it would at all events be natural and right as you are both in the same house—if you sometimes went about with Miss Foster?"

Lallie sighed deeply.

"I was in quarantine when I came," she said, "and it seems to me that I've never got rid of the infection. But I'll try to do as you say, for you're a dear darling and I love you; but it seems to me that unless I can hire an aeroplane and go up alone in that, I'm certain to meet somebody, and they always turn and go back with me."

CHAPTER IX

MISS FOSTER really was a much-tried woman. Just as she had settled comfortably into her groove, just as she had got the domestic arrangements in B. House to run on oiled wheels exactly in the direction she desired, just as the whole household had learnt that her will was law and her methods the only possible methods, there came this girl—this most upsetting, disorganising, disturbing girl: a girl as impossible to ignore as to coerce; a girl whose all-pervading presence was made manifest in every corner of the house.

Miss Foster was above all things orderly. She made a fetish of tidiness, and her drawing-room was its temple. She had arranged it entirely to her own liking, and the furniture was as the fixed stars in the fabric of the firmament. It really pained and distressed her should a fidgeting guest move a chair ever so little out of its own proper orbit, and she quite longed

for such an one to depart that she might promptly push the errant piece of furniture back into its original position. In her eyes the drawing-room was perfect, incapable of improvement, and any alteration therein must of necessity be for the worse.

Imagine her feelings then when she came back to find a grand piano and a harp added to its effects! Even this she might have borne had the harp remained quietly in some inconspicuous corner; but it proved a restless and ubiquitous instrument, and she never knew where she might find it next.

Lallie could not move it herself, and she would ring for one of the maids to help her; and once moved would leave it where it was, even though three chairs and a sofa had been displaced to make room for it. Before her arrival the drawing-room had never been used in the morning unless for the reception of some lunching parent. The fire had been lit at two precisely, and up to three o'clock Miss Foster rarely entered the room unless to arrange the two vases of flowers that always graced the mantelpiece. Miss Foster was of the opinion

that there was something irregular, Bohemian, almost disreputable, in *using* a drawing-room for any other purpose than that of receiving friends; and it seemed to her to emphasise the unpleasant fact of Lallie's Irish origin, that now the girl invaded this sacred room directly after breakfast, and that the fire was lit before by Tony Bevan's orders.

Lallie practised there, sewed there, even cut things out there upon the gate table that hitherto had never been unfolded except for afternoon tea.

She would leave her green silk work-bag hanging on the backs of chairs or slung carelessly upon any excrescence that happened to be handy, such as the bell or the knob of a Chippendale tallboys. She left books about on unaccustomed tables, and had been known to fling the newspaper outspread and sprawling, loose and flagrant, upon the Chesterfield that stood in stately comfort at a convenient distance from the hearth.

Everywhere there were traces of Lallie. When she sewed, and she was always sewing if she wasn't knitting, she dropped bits of

thread and snippets of material upon the carpet, sometimes even pins.

A large old-fashioned footstool was placed in the very centre of the hearthrug right against the tall brass fender. Miss Foster liked it there, and it had never been moved or even used except when some unusually bold boy would sit thereon and warm his back when he came to tea. Lallie was for ever moving that stool. Nearly all the chairs in the drawing-room were rather high, and she liked a footstool. It never occurred to her that the footstool was to be considered in any other light than as a footstool, and she dragged it about to whatsoever chair she wanted to sit in, sometimes curling up the edge of the hearthrug in her course.

> "A footstool by the hearth so prim,
> An oaken footstool was to him
> And it was nothing more"—

Only in this case the him was a her, which made such insensibility even more unpardonable in Miss Foster's eyes.

"Why do you always move the footstool, Miss Clonmell?" she asked one day.

"Because the chairs are so tall and my legs are so short," Lallie answered.

"The chairs are of the usual height. Chairs are not nowadays manufactured for pigmies," Miss Foster said severely.

"Did they use to be?" Lallie demanded with interest.

"No one has ever complained of the chairs in this house before," Miss Foster continued, ignoring Lallie's question.

"I never complained of them, Miss Foster. They're very nice chairs as chairs go: a bit straight and stiff, perhaps, but quite endurable if one has a footstool. Tony has comfortable chairs in his room. I wonder how men always manage to get such comfortable chairs? It's the same at home; Dad has always the best of the chairs in his den, though I must say we have a good many that are pretty decent."

"The hearth does look so naked without that stool," Miss Foster lamented.

"I'll try to remember to put it back when I've done with it," Lallie said, with undiminished sweetness; "but I'm not very good at putting things back."

"That I have already observed, Miss Clonmell, and it is a pity. No untidy person has ever achieved real greatness."

"Are you sure, Miss Foster? That's rather a sweeping assertion."

"I believe it to be a fact," Miss Foster replied coldly, "although it is quite possible you may be able to bring forward one or two examples to the contrary."

"I'm trying to think of all the lives of great men that ever I've read, and I can't remember if it said they were tidy or not. I've an idea some of them were not. Goldsmith now——"

"Goldsmith was Irish," Miss Foster interrupted.

"So was Wellington; so's Lord Roberts."

Miss Foster, without being at all sure of her facts, longed to point out that orderliness was a striking characteristic of both these heroes, but the fact of their nationality deterred her.

"I fear," Lallie went on, "that Shakespeare must have had a niggly sort of mind in some ways in spite of his genius, because he left his wife the second-best bed. If he'd been an ordinary, careless, good-natured kind of man

he'd never have remembered to specify *which* bed. Perhaps, though"—and here Lallie spoke more cheerfully, as though she suddenly perceived a rift in this cloud resting upon Shakespeare's memory—"it was his wife who was so tiresome and finnicky, always pestering him about not using the *best* things, so he left her the second-best bed as a punishment."

Miss Foster made no reply, but opened the *Spectator* with a flourish and held it up in front of her as a screen.

"Don't you think that is possible, Miss Foster?" Lallie persisted.

"I must refuse to discuss any such absurd contingency. I have already told you that I believe disorderly personal habits to be incompatible with true greatness of character."

Lallie sighed deeply.

"It sounds like a police court case," she said sadly. "'Lallie Clonmell, having no visible means of subsistence, and giving no address, was yesterday arrested as being of "disorderly personal habits."' Well, Tony would come and bail me out if the worst came to the worst. And yet I'm considered very tidy and managing

at home; quite a sort of Mrs. Shakespeare, in fact. Everything depends on environment."

Miss Foster made no answer. Literally and figuratively she had wrapped herself up in the *Spectator*.

But the harp, the piano, the bits of cotton dropped on the floor were mere venial offences compared to the sin of making dirty footmarks upon the stair carpet.

The front staircase at B. House is imposing, wide, and Y-shaped. The first broad flight of steps starts from the centre of the large square hall. Half way up it branches into two, terminating at opposite ends of the landing upon which open the chief bedrooms, and the assistant-master's sitting-room. It is a handsome staircase of polished oak—no other house in Hamchester College has one half so fine—and it was at that time carpeted with a particularly soft and thick, self-coloured, art-blue carpet that matched the walls.

When the master of the house found how conspicuous were muddy or dirty footmarks on this same carpet, and how such defacement distressed Miss Foster who had chosen it, he always

used the boys' staircase whenever he went to his room to change. So did Mr. Johns. Till Lallie came no one save Miss Foster ever used the front staircase at all, and she was most careful never to ascend by it if her boots were either muddy or dusty. She therefore saw no reason why Lallie should not show equal forethought, especially as there was no chance of her guest meeting any of the boys on the back staircase, as they were never allowed to go up to the dormitories during the day.

Alas! Lallie showed no disposition to consider the welfare of the carpet, but ran lightly up to her room by the front stairs no matter how dirty her boots, and she often left the clear impression of a small sole on every step.

The third time this occurred Miss Foster met her just outside her bedroom door, and remarked with some acerbity:

"Haven't you discovered the other staircase yet, Miss Clonmell? It really is the shortest way to your room."

"I like these stairs best, thank you. I'm not used to wooden stairs; my feet make such a patter it disturbs me."

"But look at the marks your feet have made on the carpet," Miss Foster expostulated indignantly.

Lallie went to the top of the stairs and looked down.

"They're very little marks," she said consolingly. "My worst enemy couldn't say I've big feet."

"Quite large enough to make ugly and distressing stains when the feet happen to be muddy. Don't you see how *every* mark shows on that plain carpet?"

"Yes, it must be tiresome," Lallie said coolly, as though she and the footmarks had nothing whatever to do with one another. "It's a pity Tony went and chose a colour like that where people have always to be going up and down, but it's just like a man not to think of these things."

Miss Foster was really angry.

"There is no necessity for any one to go up and down with dirty feet, Miss Clonmell."

Lallie's cheeks flushed pink, and the eyes that met Miss Foster's were bright with defiance as she said softly and distinctly:

"When Mr. Bevan asks me to use the back staircase I'll do it; so far, he has not so much as suggested it," and with her head in the air Lallie marched across the landing to her room and shut the door very quietly, with ostentatious care that it should latch effectively.

It was a declaration of war, and, as such, Miss Foster received it.

That evening Miss Foster unbosomed herself in a letter to her favourite niece—the niece whose wedding she had attended when Lallie, as she described it, "sneaked in" during her absence.

"That girl's presence becomes more and more irksome every day, and I really do feel that her prolonged stay is likely to be a serious menace to the peace of B. House. You know how undesirable and unwholesome it is for manly boys to have anything whatever to do with girls of that sort, the sort that is always polite and pleasant, making them think far too much of themselves. It isn't exactly *what she says* that one can object to, though any conversation I have overheard is always extremely foolish, but she has a way of looking up under her eyelashes—I do dislike very thick black

eyelashes in a grown-up person, they give such a made-up look to the face—that is most objectionable. She is not a pretty girl, quite pale and insignificant, and so small; but as I say she flatters men, and young and old they all seem perfectly silly about her, and therefore she is a most dangerous and disturbing influence. It is particularly trying for me, for the tone of B. House has always been so high ever since I came here; and I cannot but feel that this girl has imported an atmosphere of noisy frivolity and insubordination that must lead to moral deterioration. So far I have not discovered anything with regard to the boys that one can exactly complain of, but I have no doubt whatever that she is sly and underhand. The Irish are proverbially untrustworthy, and she seems to me to embody all the worst characteristics of that stormy and unreliable race.

"People here make a great fuss about her singing and playing, but I never was an admirer of loud voices, and particularly dislike her theatrical and affected way of singing. 'Dramatic' they call it, but to my thinking it is simply unladylike! I have no patience with people who can work themselves up into a state about nothing at all. I can appreciate a good concert now and then as much as anybody;

but to have constant shouting and thrumming going on in my drawing-room is a very real trial. It's not only herself, but other people come to sing duets and practise their songs. Young masters who never entered the house before come now and bawl for hours, because they say she is such a beautiful accompanist. They come to *flirt* with her, that's what they come for; and dear, innocent Mr. Bevan never seems to see it. It is extraordinary how blind men are to the wiles of a designing girl.

"As you may imagine a girl of any sort is rather a white elephant in a house like this, but had she been a nice, sensible, ordinary girl, with no nonsense about her, I would have managed. As it is, I don't know what may happen. Goodness knows how many other instruments she can play. I always enter the drawing-room in fear and trembling lest a drum and a trombone be added to the existing collection.

"Mrs. Wentworth has chosen to make a great fuss of her, and she, in her turn, makes a great fuss of the children. As you know I am not one of those who go about raving over Mrs. Wentworth. I could not truckle like some of them to that commonplace little woman. I am surprised that Dr. Wentworth has not himself suggested the desirability of Miss Clon-

mell's departure before this. But men are curious. They will let an abuse continue till it becomes absolutely intolerable rather than interfere with one another. It has struck me again and again since I came here how procrastinating men are, how extremely unwilling to speak the word in season. Well, I intend to do my part, cost what it may; my vigilance shall be untiring; and when I find, as I have no doubt I shall find, that that girl has overstepped the limits of propriety I shall go straight to Mr. Bevan with the facts. *Then* he cannot refuse to act firmly in the interest of the House. So far we have been free from any infectious disease. If only the other houses were as carefully disinfected and watched as this one, such illnesses might be stamped out altogether. Yet whenever I suggest my methods to those in charge of other houses I receive but scant sympathy or even thanks."

CHAPTER X

MEANWHILE, Tony was daily getting more and more used to Lallie's presence. The pleasant, almost exciting sense of novelty had worn off, giving place to a still pleasanter feeling of familiar security.

She would be there when he got back, this girl with the soft full voice and delightful welcoming manner, and he found himself watching the clock like the laziest boy in his form during the last hour of afternoon school.

For years past, although he lived in a crowd and possessed troops of friends, he had been rather a lonely man, and his loneliness was accentuated rather than lessened when he came into possession of B. House.

"Truly you may call it a 'house,' " he said to a congratulating college friend. "It's far less of a home than my old diggings. I don't feel as though a single stick of the furniture

really belongs to me except my old arm-chair and my desk."

Now, however, he thought more fondly of B. House; particularly of his study, where he knew that he would find a bright fire, the little tea-table drawn up beside his chair, and the brass kettle singing merrily over the spirit lamp. Not that these things were new. There had always been tea laid for him in his study when he came in at half-past five; but now it was Lallie who made the tea, not Ford, and Lallie made excellent tea. Moreover, she always had a great deal to ask and to tell. She took the deepest interest in all College matters, and absolutely declined to regard anything from a tutorial standpoint; and this in itself was restful and refreshing to Tony.

To her, Tony Bevan was above all the old friend tried by time; "the best of good sorts," "the decentest old thing." That he happened also to be a schoolmaster was perhaps unfortunate, but she generously declined to let this regrettable fact influence her attitude towards him.

She knew well that he wanted her above all things to be happy, and with him she always was happy. Furthermore she had loyally kept her resolution not to worry Tony with any knowledge of the friction that existed between herself and Miss Foster. He was not much at B. House, and being of a good-natured and tolerant disposition himself, he always gave other people credit for being similarly well disposed until he had ample proof to the contrary. Besides, in his presence Lallie and Miss Foster almost unconsciously adopted a manner towards one another that was at least free from signs of open hostility.

When Lallie had been a week at B. House she took her host's personal appearance firmly in hand. In the morning she flew after him to brush his coat before he went up to College. She exclaimed indignantly at the "bagsomeness" of his trouser knees. Finding that he did not possess any form of trouser-press she insisted on his going with her into the town to buy one. And when it was sent home, she folded the offending garments and placed them in it herself. She objected to ties that looked

"like a worn-out garter," and said so. She even suggested that certain old and well-loved coats might be sent to the Mission, but here Tony was firm in his opposition. He would buy a new suit to please her, but part with his old coats he would not; and Lallie was far too diplomatic to press the matter.

She tried always to be at home to make tea for him when he came in at half-past five, and cut short many a tea-party to keep this tryst. She was in great demand at other houses, especially the houses where the heads were musical.

She was waiting for Tony on the evening of the footprint encounter with Miss Foster, and when she had fed and warmed and cosseted him generally she sat down in the big chair opposite his and faced him squarely, announcing:

"Hunting begins this week, Tony."

"Does it really? How the year is getting on."

"Tony, dear, don't you think I might hunt if I took out one of the men from the riding school as groom—just one day a week?"

Tony shook his head.

"If your father had wanted you to hunt I am sure he would have suggested it, and he would probably have made arrangements for you to have a couple of the horses over; but he has never so much as mentioned it, and I can't let you do it on my own responsibility. I don't believe he'd like it for you here either. It isn't as if I could go with you."

"Much good you'd be if you could go with me. You know, Tony, you are not at your best across a horse. As for Dad not having made arrangements—this Indian trip was got up and settled in such a tremendous hurry, he had no time to think about me at all. Listen to me now! How would you feel if when they began to mow the grass in May, and the good smell was in the air, and you saw all the others in their flannels, and heard all round you the nice deep ring of the cricket balls—and you mightn't play a stroke, and your arm as strong and your eye as true as ever it was. How would you like it?"

"I shouldn't like it at all; but——"

"Well, then, think of me. The smell of the wet dead leaves and the south wind blowing the

soft rain against my face is just as full of association for me. And I never go out but I see long strings of horses in their nice new clothing, the dear darlings! And me, ME, that has gone hunting on the opening day ever since I could sit a fat little Shetland pony, ME to stay pokily at home! Tony, I simply can't! You must let me."

"Lallie, the two cases are not analogous. You can go out riding whenever you like, provided you take a man; but hunting, no. Not without your father's permission. Especially here, you are too young—too——"

"Too what? You can't say I'm timid. You can't say I couldn't ride any mount they choose to give me at that old school. Look here, Tony, suppose they said, 'You may play cricket—oh, yes, at the nets with a wee little junior boy to bowl to you; but no matches, no playing with people who play as well as you do' —would you say 'Thank you'? And that's precisely what you offer me. Let me tell you I ride just as well as you play cricket—blue and all; and to please you I've even gone pounding round that ridiculous racecourse with

half a dozen other girls who sit a horse like a sack of potatoes, who'd be off at every bounce but for the pommel. D'you think I call that riding? Oh, Tony, dear, if I could just have one good gallop across country after the hounds, I'd be a better girl—much nicer and easier to get on with."

"I don't find you particularly hard to get on with as it is."

"Other people do, though"—Lallie's conscience pricked her as to Miss Foster—"and I dare say I'm often a great nuisance; but once let me work the steam off on the back of a good horse and I'd be an angel. Just you let me go out with the hounds on Thursday and you'll see."

"Lallie, my child, don't. I would if I could, but I simply dare not. Your father would never forgive me. It was quite different last winter when he was there himself to look after you."

"My dear, good man, a hunting field isn't like the 'croc' of a girls' school. No one can 'look after' anybody else. You either ride straight or you potter, or you rush your fences

and get in people's way. But whatever you do you're on your own. If you come a bad smash there's always a hurdle to lay you on, and a doctor and a farmhouse somewhere about. If you think Dad kept me in his pocket three days a week throughout the hunting season all these years, you've a more fertile imagination than I gave you credit for, and Dad would be the first to disillusion you. We went to the meets together, and after that we saw precious little of one another."

"What about riding home?"

"Hardly ever did we come home together. Sometimes he got home first, sometimes I did; and whichever of us was first in got the bath, and the other was pretty sure to come pounding at the door before the early bird was out of it. You *can't* chaperon people out hunting. Why, by the time I'd been out three times here, I'd know the whole field, and you'd be perfectly happy knowing I was among friends."

Lallie sat forward in her chair gazing eagerly at Tony, who said nothing at all; but from the expression of his face it might have been gathered that this prediction of her speedy intimacy

with all the field gave him no satisfaction whatever.

"Well, Tony?" she demanded impatiently.

"I'm sorry, but it's impossible. You can write to Fitz if you like and ask him to cable his opinion."

"No, indeed. I'll write and tell him that unless he cables forbidding me, I'm going to hunt. Dad will always do the easiest thing, and I know will never bother to cable forbidding me to do a thing I've done for years."

Lallie's voice was almost defiant, and poor Tony looked very pained, but he said nothing; and after a minute's silence she continued in a more conciliatory tone:

"Then in a fortnight's time from next mail if I don't hear, I may hunt?"

"You must give him three weeks, for he may be up country, and his mail takes days to reach him after the agent gets it."

"And by that time there'll be a frost; I didn't think it of you, Tony, I really didn't. In this matter you out-Emileen Aunt Emileen herself."

Tony rose.

"You have my leave to depart," he said, opening the door for her; "I've a lot of letters to write, and those chaps are coming to bridge after dinner, so I must do them now."

"Well, I think you're horrid, and if a slate falls on my head and kills me when I'm out walking, just you reflect how nice and safe I'd have been if I'd had my own way and been out in the open country."

"I'll risk the slate," Tony remarked unfeelingly; but still he would not look at Lallie, who stood in the doorway gazing reproachfully at him.

"And you're going to play bridge and have a nice time while I sit solemnly in the drawing-room making a waistcoat for you, ungrateful man. You've never asked me to take a hand, and I play quite well."

"You see, this is a club; we meet at each other's houses—there are no ladies——"

"Of all the monastical establishments I've ever come across this is the strictest, and you call Ireland a priest-ridden country."

"Lallie, I must write my letters."

At that moment Mr. Johns came into the hall, bearing a large and heavy book.

"Well, you deny me everything that keeps me out of mischief—on your own head be it," said Lallie rapidly, in low tones of ominous menace. Then, turning to the newcomer, she smiled a radiant welcome, exclaiming joyously: "You've brought your snapshots to show me! How kind of you! I'm badly in need of something to cheer me up. Come into the drawing-room, for Mr. Bevan is busy and Miss Foster's out, so we'll have it all to ourselves."

With quite unnecessary violence Mr. Bevan rang the bell for Ford to take away tea. Yet, when Ford, looking rather aggrieved, had responded to his noisy summons and removed the tea-things with her customary quiet deftness, he did not sit down at once to deal with his correspondence. Instead, he went and stood in front of the fire staring at the Greuze girl who was so like Lallie.

He ran his fingers through his smooth thick hair—a sure sign of mental perturbation with Tony—and he made the discovery that he was furiously angry; not with Lallie, the wilful and

inconsequent, but with the unoffending Mr. Johns.

"Confound the fellow and his snapshots!" thought Tony; "if there's one kind of hobby more detestable than another it's that of the ardent amateur photographer. A man given up to it is almost as bad as the chap who wears cotton-wool in his ears, and is always taking medicine. There were these two" (with the second-sight vouchsafed to most of us upon occasion, Tony was perfectly correct in his surmise) "sitting side by side on the sofa with their heads close together, and that great heavy book spread out on their joint knees. Heavens! he would be proposing to snapshot Lallie next" (which is precisely what Mr. Johns was doing at that moment). "He, Tony, would not have it. He would interfere, he would—" Suddenly, exclaiming aloud, "What an ass I am!" he sat down at his desk with the firm determination to attend to his letters. He drew a neatly docketed bundle towards him, and selected the top one. It was that of Uridge Major's father, who wrote pointing out what a steadying effect it would have upon the boy

were he made a prefect that term. Tony dealt diplomatically with this, but instead of going methodically through the bundle as he had fully intended to do he drew from his pocket a letter he had received from Fitzroy Clonmell last mail. It consisted of two closely written sheets; the first mainly descriptive of the sport they were enjoying, and duly concluded with the pious hope that his daughter was behaving herself. This was manifestly intended to be shown to Lallie. It was the second sheet that Tony read and re-read when he ought to have been allaying the misgivings of anxious-minded parents.

"By the way," it ran, "if one Sidney Bargrave Ballinger should happen to call upon Lallie while she is with you, be decent to him, will you? He fell hopelessly in love with her at Fareham last winter, and followed us to Ireland for fishing in the spring, when he proposed and she refused him. Consequently she is unlikely ever to have mentioned his name. The frankest and most garrulous creature about all that concerns herself, she is extraordinarily reticent as to things concerning other people, especially if she thinks it might be in any way

unpleasant for them to have their affairs discussed. They parted quite good friends, and I take it as not unlikely that she might be brought to reconsider her decision. You will probably think him a bit of a crock—old son of Anak that you are! So he is in some ways, but he is also quite a good sort, refined, kind-hearted, and a gentleman; a Trinity man, with somewhat scholarly tastes. I am sure he would make her a good and indulgent husband. Besides, he has an uncommonly nice place in Garsetshire, and about eight thousand a year. He came into this money quite recently through the death of an uncle, and having now a 'stake in the country' he feels, I suppose, that he ought to be a bit of a sportsman, and he does his best to achieve that character, although I don't believe he has a single sporting instinct in him. He broke his collar-bone the second time he came out hunting last season; but he hunted again the minute it was mended, and rode as queerly as ever. He followed us to Kerry for fishing in April, and flogged the stream all day without getting a single rise; but he contrived to see something of Lallie, which was what he came for.

"Should he appear in Hamchester I'd like to know how he strikes you. I'm so horribly afraid she may want to marry some impecunious

soldier chap imported by Paddy, who will carry her off to a vile climate where she would assuredly go under in a year or two, that it would be a real comfort to me to see her safely married to a good fellow who could give her all the pleasures she most cares for and has been accustomed to; and even if he isn't a sportsman himself would not be averse from her fond father occasionally sharing in the same—but this is a very secondary consideration. A son-in-law will be such an incubus that nothing he can bring in his hand will mitigate the nuisance much.

"Perhaps he won't turn up at all, but if he does, don't cold-shoulder him—he has my blessing. Give him his chance. She'll follow her own line of country in any long run, but there's no harm in giving her an occasional lead in the most desirable direction. I wish he hadn't been called Sidney, it's a name I detest; still, we can call him by his middle name if it ever reaches the necessity for a familiar appellation.

"*Salve atque vale.*

"From yours,

"FITZ."

Tony knit his brows and pondered. Had Mr. Sidney Bargrave Ballinger already arrived? he wondered. Was that why Lallie was so ar-

dently desirous of going out with the hounds on Thursday? No; he acquitted her of any form of stratagem. If she had seen the man she would have mentioned it. She always made a bee-line for anything she wanted, and intrigue was as foreign to her nature as mischief-making.

He was worried and irritable; he couldn't settle to his letters; and he felt quite unaccountably annoyed with Fitz for thus shifting the burden of responsibility from his own shoulders to Tony's. And Tony, being of a just and charitable temperament, took himself seriously to task for having instantaneously and irrevocably taken a violent dislike to the unseen and unknown Sidney Bargrave Ballinger.

CHAPTER XI

THAT evening Dr. and Mrs. Wentworth dined alone. This was quite an unusual occurrence, for their circle of friends was large and they were exceedingly hospitable. As there was nobody to entertain after dinner Mrs. Wentworth went and sat in her husband's study and "relaxed her mind over a book," while he wrote some of the innumerable and inevitable letters that fall to the lot of every headmaster. The answers to parental missives were generally submitted to Mrs. Wentworth's criticism, and she insisted upon his softening the asperities occasioned by their frequent ineptness. Dr. Wentworth did not suffer fools gladly, but his wife regarded such things from the maternal standpoint; consequently the headmaster of Hamchester got credit for a sympathetic attitude he by no means deserved.

At that moment he was dealing with the case of one Pinner, an extremely stupid boy of

seventeen in a low form, whose mother wrote saying she would like him to begin at once to specialise with a view to entering the Indian Civil Service later on.

Suddenly Mrs. Wentworth laid down her book and sat listening.

"Isn't that one of the children?" she asked.

Dr. Wentworth, deep in the demolition of Pinner's prospects, did not answer.

"I'm sure it's one of the children," Mrs. Wentworth repeated, and hastened upstairs.

Dismal wails smote upon her ear as she neared the night nurseries, and she found Punch sitting up in bed flushed and tearful, and not to be pacified by his devoted nurse who was standing by his cot alternately soothing and remonstrating.

"Hush, Punch! you'll wake Pris and Prue in the next room. What is the matter? Did you have a bad dream? Were you frightened?"

"No," Punch proclaimed in a muffled sort of roar, "I'm not fitened, but I can't sleep because she won't sing Kevin. I can't mimember it and I can't sleep. Oh, do sing Kevin."

"I don't know what he means, mum," nurse

exclaimed distractedly. "Is it a hymn, do you think?"

"No," bawled Punch indignantly; "t'int a hymn. Oh, *do* sing Kevin," he wailed, standing up in his cot with his arms round his mother's neck and his hot, tear-stained little face pressed against hers.

"But, Punch, dear, what *is* Kevin? Of course I'll sing it if you'll only explain."

"But you can't," lamented Punch; and inconsequent as inconsolable he reiterated, "Oh, do sing Kevin."

"But who can sing this song?" Mrs. Wentworth asked. "Where have you heard it?"

"Lallie singed it. Oh, do get Lallie. Lallie knows Kevin."

"I can't get Lallie to come and sing for you in the middle of the night. You mustn't be unreasonable. You must wait until next time you see her—perhaps to-morrow—then you can ask her to sing for you."

"T'int the miggle of the night," Punch retorted scornfully, "or you'd be wearing a nighty gown. Please, dear mudger, get Lallie, ven she'll sing Kevin and I'll go to sleep."

Mrs. Wentworth and the nurse exchanged glances across the cot.

"'Tis but a step across the playground to B. House," the nurse said in a low voice. "I know the young lady would pop over. He's been goin' on like this for over an hour."

Punch had ceased to wail; now he loosed his arms from about his mother's neck, sat back on his pillow, and looked from one to the other of the anxious faces on either side of him.

"He's such a obstinate boy," she murmured. "He'll never give up wanting it, and *she* can sing Kevin."

Mrs. Wentworth tried hard to look stern.

"Daddie wouldn't like it; and what would Lallie think to be fetched out at this time of night to sing to a tiresome little boy who ought to have been asleep hours ago."

Punch screwed up his face and prepared to wail again, but caught his breath and stopped in the middle of the first note to listen to his adoring nurse as she suggested in a whisper:

"I'll pop over for her, mum, and she'll be here directly. I'm quite worried about him. It seems to have got on his nerves; he's so feverish."

Mrs. Wentworth felt one of the hot little hands and stroked his damp hair back from his forehead. Punch stared unblinkingly at her, and repeated mournfully:

"He's fevish, very fevish; but," more hopefully, "he won't be if Lallie's feshed, 'cos then she'll sing Kevin."

"I know Daddie would disapprove," Mrs. Wentworth said weakly; "and, Nana, imagine what people will say. What will Miss Foster think?"

"I'm sure the young lady's not one to go talking," said Nana stoutly, "and she so fond of Master Punch and all. And he really has been frettin' something dreadful, and we none of us can sing that outlandish song; and you know how he keeps on, mum."

"Nobody knows it but Lallie," Punch repeated. "Lallie can sing Kevin. Oh, do sing Kevin."

Mrs. Wentworth nodded to the nurse, who departed hastily.

Punch sat on his pillow, wide-eyed and wakeful, with flushed round face and tired, unblinking eyes.

"Would you like to come and sit on my knee in the day nursery for a bit, Sonnie? Then perhaps you'll feel sleepy. I'll sing you anything you like."

"I'll come and sit on your knee till Lallie comes, then she'll sing Kevin. I don't want no other song."

"How do you know Lallie will come? She may be dining out; she may not be there."

"I fought you said it was the miggle of the night," Punch said sternly. "If it is she'll be back again."

"It is the middle of the night for little boys."

"But not for Lallie; I fink she'll come."

Mrs. Wentworth arrayed him in his blue dressing-gown and carried him into the big day nursery. She sat down in a low chair in front of the fire, with Punch warm and cuddlesome on her knee snuggled against her shoulder. He lay quite still in her arms, staring at the red glow through the bars of the high nursery fender.

"Do you think that little boys who wear beautiful pyjama suits just like their daddie's, ought to wake up and cry in the night?" Mrs. Wentworth inquired dreamily, her chin resting

on the top of Punch's head, her eyes fixed on the fire.

"I fink I could sleep till Lallie comes," Punch announced in particularly wide-awake tones. "Hush!"

For nearly ten minutes they sat still and silent, then Punch suddenly gave a little wriggle and sat up on his mother's knee, stiff and expectant: every nerve tingling, every muscle taut.

"I fink I hear Lallie," he cried excitedly.

There was a swish and *frou-frou* of skirts in the passage outside as Lallie, followed by the triumphant Nana, came swiftly into the room. She flung her heavy cloak on a chair, and ran across and knelt by Mrs. Wentworth, exclaiming:

"How dear of you to send! I do so sympathise with Punch; I nearly go crazy if I half remember a tune and there's no way of getting the rest of it."

"T'int the chune; it's it all," said Punch magisterially. "Now you can sing Kevin."

"But do you know what he means?" Mrs. Wentworth asked.

"I should think I do. Oh, might I hold him? It's a longish song."

She was dressed in a little straight white silk dress embroidered with green, and her favourite green ribbon was threaded through her hair. Slender arms and neck were bare, and her cheeks flushed with her run across the playground in the cold air. She might have been Deirdre herself, product of sun and dew and woodland moss, so fresh and sparkling was she. Punch held out his arms to her.

"I knowed you'd come," he cried triumphantly; "an' you wouldn't be in bed, nor out, nor nuffin' like they said. I knowed you'd come."

Mrs. Wentworth gave Lallie her chair, and then Punch to cuddle, and forthwith Lallie burst into a rollicking tune and the legend:

"As Saint Kevin was a wanderin' by the shores of Glendalough,
He met one King O'Toole and he axed him for a schough;
Says the King, 'You are a sthranger and your face I've never seen,
But if you've got a bit of weed I'll lend you my dhudeen!' "

To Punch the whole thing was vivid as an experience. He saw as in a vision the wind-swept shores of Glendalough. The only "lough"

he had ever really seen was an ornamental lake in the town gardens, but Lallie had told him that King O'Toole's lough was a hundred times as big as that, so Punch pictured something very vast indeed. She had not explained what "schough" was and he had not asked, for he concluded it was some kind of bonfire from the context.

"As the Saint was lighting up the fire the monarch heaved a sigh.
'Is there anyt'ing the matter,' says the Saint, 'that makes you cry?'
Says the King, 'I had a ghander as was left me by my mother,
An' this mornin' he turned up his toes with some disase or other.' "

So Punch pictured a bonfire that crackled like those the gardner made with rubbish in the kitchen garden. The saint agrees to cure the ghander on condition that should the bird recover, he shall receive

"the bit o' land the ghander will fly round."

" 'Faix I will and very welcome,' says the King, 'give what you ask,' " and departs forthwith to the palace to fetch the "burd."

"So the Saint then tuk the ghander from the arrums of the King,
And first began to twig his beak and then to stretch his wing.
He cushed the bird into the air! he flew thirty miles around,
Says the Saint, 'I'll thank yer Majesty for that little thaste of ground!' "

But the king was in no mind to part with such a large slice of his property, and he called his "six big sons" to heave St. Kevin in a ditch.

" 'Nabocklish,' says the saint, 'I'll soon finish them young urchins,' " and he forthwith transformed King O'Toole and his sons into the Seven Churches of Glendalough.

Meanwhile Dr. Wentworth had finished his letter to Pinner's mother, and longed to read it to his wife, for he felt that the pill of truth was gilded with charity in quite angelic fashion, and he thirsted for her appreciation and applause. Minutes passed, and still she did not come. The house was very quiet and he felt sure she must have been mistaken about the children, and wondered what on earth she could be doing; then suddenly, into the silence, there floated a voice uplifted in most

cheerful song: a melody that set the head nodding and the heels drumming.

Not for one instant did Dr. Wentworth even wonder as to the owner of the voice. No one who had heard Lallie sing once could fail to recognise her singing when he heard it again. The siren song drew him from his letters and up the stairs to the half-open door of the nursery, and there he stood watching the pretty picture by the fire.

Punch, majestic and satisfied at last, sat bolt upright on Lallie's knee. Her arms were round him; but she leant back in her chair that she might the better watch his serious baby face. Mrs. Wentworth and nurse stood on the other side of the hearth, both absorbed in adoring contemplation of the small figure in the blue dressing-gown. Neither of them saw the doctor, but Lallie did, and gave him a merry nod of greeting.

"An' if ye go there any day at the hour of one o'clock,
You'll see the ghander flyin' round the Lake of Glendalough."

The song ceased, and Punch turned himself to look earnestly in Lallie's face, demanding:

"Have you seen him?"

"Well, no, I can't say I have, but then I've never been there just at that time."

"Sing it again," Punch suggested sweetly.

"NO, NO, NO," Mrs. Wentworth cried sternly; "Punch must go to bed this instant."

"I said I would if she singed it, an' I will," said Punch. "Lallie can carry me."

"NO, NO, NO," said another voice, and Punch's father came into the room. "You're far too heavy for Miss Lallie, I'll take you; but I'd like to know what you mean by being awake at this hour, and how you manage to get young ladies to sing for you?"

"I came over," Lallie replied hastily; "I was lonely and he was awake, and worrying because no one could sing St. Kevin, so I sang it, and I have enjoyed myself so much, but I must fly back now. Good-night, you darling Punch."

Dr. Wentworth escorted Lallie back to B. House, and to this day does not know that she was "feshed." Neither did Miss Foster, for she was upstairs discussing the probability of an outbreak of chicken-pox with Matron when Lallie was "feshed"; and finding the drawing-room untenanted on her return, concluded that

Lallie had gone to bed, and went herself in something of a huff. It was one thing for her to leave Lallie for the whole evening, but it was quite another matter for Lallie to retire without bidding her a ceremonious good-night. Lallie crept in at the side door—Ford had left it unbolted for her—and went upstairs by the back staircase.

Punch, warm and soft, with that indescribably delicious perfume of clean flannel and violet powder that pervades cherished infancy, had filled her heart with charity and loving-kindness towards all the world.

"I was a pig about the stairs," she said to herself; "I'll use these for the future. Perhaps if I try to be less tiresome she'll not dislike me so much. Oh, dear, why is it so easy to do what some people want? Now if Mrs. Wentworth asked me to climb up a ladder every time I went to my room I'd do it joyfully, and poor Miss Foster asks me to use a good wooden staircase when it's a dirty day and it seems utterly impossible to do it. I'll really try and be nice to her—but she won't let me. Never mind, I can but try."

CHAPTER XII

NEXT morning Lallie went into the town between twelve and one. She had a real and legitimate errand, inasmuch as she needed more silk for the waistcoat she was working for Tony.

Since Mrs. Wentworth's remonstrance she had never once walked down the promenade alone between twelve and one, and to-day she felt particularly virtuous and light-hearted. She would go straight to the shop, match the silk, and come home at once. "I'll walk up and down with nobody," she said to herself, "not even if the band's playing 'Carmen.' "

As it happened, the band was playing selections from "The Merry Widow" when she reached the shops, and she was not tempted to break her good resolutions, for she met no friends at all until she had bought her silks. "I'll go just to the bottom of the promenade

and walk up again," she thought, "it's such a cheerful morning."

It was. The sun shone as it sometimes will shine at the beginning of the gloomiest month. The air was soft and humid, and though the roads were shocking the wide pavement of Hamchester promenade was clean. Lallie looked down anxiously at her shapely strong brown boots. No, they had not suffered; they were smart and trim, and did no shame to the well-hung short skirt above them. She squared her shoulders, held her head very high, and strolled along serene in the assurance that in all essentials she presented a creditable appearance. So evidently thought a young man coming up the promenade towards her.

He was a man of middle height, slight and fair, and wearing pince-nez; clean-shaven, with full prominent blue eyes, a large head, pinkish complexion, and an amiable, if weak, mouth. Admiring friends told him that he greatly resembled the poet Shelley, and he prided himself upon the likeness while in no way dressing to the part. He had an extremely long neck, which rather emphasised the fact that his

shoulders were narrow and sloping. He wore a stock and was generally sporting in his attire, and his face and figure seemed curiously at variance with his clothes. In academic cap and gown his personality would have been congruous and even dignified, but clad as he was in a well-made tweed suit with riding-coat, and wearing upon his head a straight brimmed bowler, in spite of the fact that there was nothing exaggerated or *outré* in his garments he yet made upon the beholder a curious impression of artificiality, and seeing him for the first time one's first thought was, "Why does he dress like that?"

Immediately he caught sight of Lallie he hurried forward with outstretched hand and joy writ large upon his countenance.

"You, Miss Clonmell! What unspeakably good luck! I have been hoping to meet you for the last three days, and never caught a glimpse of you."

"How do you do, Mr. Ballinger?" Lallie said demurely, "and what brings *you* to these parts? Are you over for the day, or what?"

"I've come here for a bit. I'm going to

hunt here for a month or two—all the season if I like it. I suppose you're coming out to-morrow?"

"Why aren't you hunting in your own country?" Lallie asked him reproachfully. "What has Fareham done that you should desert it? Do you suppose the hunting here is better?"

"I believe it's quite decent here, really; and I know a good many people, and I thought I'd like a bit of a change—and there are other reasons. Of course you're coming out with us to-morrow?"

Lallie shook her head.

"No, I'm not hunting—yet."

"Not hunting, Miss Clonmell! What on earth is the matter? Have you lost your nerve?"

"No," snapped Lallie, "but I've lost my horse. Dad's in India, as you know; the horses are in Ireland; and I'm staying with friends who don't hunt and won't let me hunt without them."

"Oh, but that's nonsense! Were you going this way—may I walk with you? I've got a little mare here that would carry you perfectly

if you would honour me by riding her to-morrow. She has been ridden by a lady, and I believe she has excellent manners and is a good jumper. I'm putting up at the Harrow, the stables are so good. They're just at the back here. Won't you come round and look at the horses and see the little mare? It's not three minutes' walk."

Mr. Ballinger talked fast and eagerly, in short, jerky sentences, as though he were nervous.

"I'd love to see the horses," said Lallie, turning with him into the lane where the stables were, quite forgetful of her good resolutions to "walk with nobody."

"And if you like the look of the mare you'll come out to-morrow?"

"Ah, that's quite another matter. I don't think I can do that. Tony wouldn't like it."

"Why wouldn't Tony, whoever he is, like it?"

"Because he can't come with me."

"And why not?"

"Because he's shut up in school."

"Now really, Miss Clonmell, that is going too far. I know how you always spoil any

boys you come across, but that you should give up a day's hunting because some wretched little schoolboy doesn't like you to go without him is absurd. Even you must see how ridiculous it is, and how bad for him. Let him attend to his work and mind his own business."

Mr. Ballinger spoke with considerable heat, and Lallie burst into delighted laughter, exclaiming:

"But he's not a little schoolboy that anybody could ignore, I assure you. Besides, I'm devoted to him."

"I have no doubt of it, but he wants putting in his place. Here are the stables."

Once among the horses, Lallie forgot everything except her delight in them; but not even the charms of Kitty, the mare, could make her promise to ride her the next day. So persistent was Mr. Ballinger, however, that to get rid of him she said she would send him a note that night should she happen to change her mind. He escorted her back to the very gate of B. House, and of course she met almost every one she knew in Hamchester while in his company.

She dismissed him at the gate, nor did she ask him in to lunch as she assuredly would have done had it been her father's house. She stood for a minute watching his somewhat slow and disappointed departure, gazing earnestly at his retreating back. Then she shook her head decidedly and went into the house.

Up the back stairs did she go in her honest desire to conciliate Miss Foster. One window on that staircase looks out on to the playground, and as she passed she caught sight of Cripps standing with two other prefects. The window was open and she looked out. All three boys looked up and capped her.

"The dears!" said Lallie to herself, and kissed her hand to them gaily as she passed.

At that very moment Miss Foster, followed by Mr. Johns, came through the swing-door at the top of the stairs. Miss Foster stopped short some four steps above Lallie, and of course Mr. Johns had to stop too, for he couldn't push past her, and to turn back would have looked odd.

"Miss Clonmell," said Miss Foster, in tones that could be heard to the farthest corner of the playground, "I really must protest against

your corrupting the boys of this house by vulgar flirtation of that kind."

Lallie stood still in her turn, absolutely petrified by indignant astonishment.

Cripps crimsoned to the roots of his hair, caught each of his friends by the arm and hurried them indoors.

"How dare you speak to me like that?" Lallie gasped out; "and before the boys too? How dare you insult me so?"

"I shall continue to do what I consider my duty whether it be agreeable to you or not, Miss Clonmell, and I tell you again that I will not have these vulgar flirtations."

"It is you who put a vulgar interpretation on the simplest actions," Lallie exclaimed furiously, and with that she turned and ran down the stairs again and across the hall and out at the front door before Miss Foster fully realised that she was gone.

At Miss Foster's first words poor Mr. Johns had turned and fled upstairs again, through the swing door, and out to the landing from which he could look down into the hall, and he saw Lallie's swift and furious exit. Down the sa-

cred front stairs he dashed and out into the drive after her, catching her just as she turned into the road.

As he joined her she lifted to him her white miserable face with tragic eyes all dark with grief and anger.

"I must walk and walk," she said breathlessly. "I am so angry; if I had stayed another minute I should have done that woman an injury. You heard what she said?"

"I quite understand," Mr. Johns said soothingly. "I hope you'll allow me to come with you. I won't talk."

"It's very nice of you, but really I'd be better alone."

"I think not," Mr. Johns said gently; "I hope you won't forbid me to come."

He looked so big, and kind, and honest, and withal so hopelessly uncomfortable, that Lallie's face softened and laughter crept back into her eyes.

"It's really very nice of you to want to come when I'm in such a bad temper. Let's go this way, where there's no people, and perhaps presently I'll feel better and we'll talk."

For nearly ten minutes Lallie pounded along in dead silence as fast as she could go. Then she began to notice that the pace which was rapidly reducing her to a state of breathless collapse had no sort of effect upon her companion, who, hands in his pockets, appeared to be strolling along in an easy sort of saunter at her side.

"This is ignominious," she exclaimed; "here am I walking as if for a wager, and you don't seem hurrying one bit."

"Am I walking too fast for you?" Mr. Johns asked, in poignant self reproach. "I am so sorry; you see, I don't often walk with ladies."

"It isn't you at all, it's me; I'm walking too fast for myself, and it's so aggravating to see somebody alongside perfectly cool and composed. If I could leave you behind, or you had to trot to keep up with me, it wouldn't be half so trying. As it is I give in. For mercy's sake let's sit on this seat for a minute. You may talk to me now. I no longer feel like tearing the hair off Miss Foster. Tell me now, what was it I did to draw such an avalanche of abuse upon me?"

Side by side they sat down upon one of the hard green seats that are placed at convenient intervals in every road leading out of Hamchester.

Lallie's cheeks were quite rosy after her rapid walk. Her grey eyes were clear and limpid again, candid and inquiring as a child's. Mr. Johns gazing into them felt compelled to speak the truth.

"I think," he said slowly, "it was because you kissed your hand to Cripps."

"It wasn't only to Mr. Cripps, it was to Mr. Berry and Mr. Hamilton as well."

"Perhaps she thought you did it to attract their attention."

"And what if I did? Would she expect me to pass three nice boys living in the same house with me—though it's little enough I see of them—with my nose in the air and never a word of greeting; and if I hadn't gone up by her nasty old back stairs just to please her, this would never have happened."

"After all," said Mr. Johns, still gazing at Lallie, although she no longer looked at him, "does it matter much what Miss Foster thinks?"

"It doesn't matter to me what she thinks, but what she says does matter. I can't let her insult me in public and take no notice."

"She often," Mr. Johns remarked ruefully, "insults me in public, and I take no notice."

"Well, it's very noble of you, but I can't reach those heights. To be told I'm a vulgar flirt and corrupt—*corrupt*, mind you—the boys, is more than I'll endure from any stout old woman on this earth. Do *you* think I'd corrupt any boys, Mr. Johns?"

"I'm quite sure you would always use your great influence in the highest possible way," Mr. Johns said solemnly, "but——"

"But what?" Lallie demanded impatiently as he hesitated.

"You might mislead a boy by—ah—for instance, kissing your hand to him."

"How mislead?"

"It's very difficult to put it in such a fashion as not to sound exaggerated and absurd; but you might, you know, make a boy think you were fond of him."

"So I am very fond of them; they're dears, and I'm perfectly ready to leave my character

in their hands. *They* wouldn't misjudge me and think horrid things."

"I don't think they would misjudge you, Miss Clonmell, but they might mistake your intention."

"My intention was perfectly plain—to give them a friendly greeting as I passed. I've always kissed my hand to people ever since I was a wee little girl—Madame taught me to do it—and if that's corrupting them, the sooner I leave B. House the better. I can't turn into Diogenes in his tub at a moment's notice. If I mayn't smile and wave to the people I know, I'd best go where there's a more friendly spirit. And so I'll tell Tony, only it will bother the poor dear so. Do you think Miss Foster will go and harangue Tony, Mr. Johns?"

"I fear it is only too likely."

"Well, she'll get a pretty dressing down when she does," and Lallie gave a sigh of deepest satisfaction. "Tony understands me, however dense other people may be."

"Don't misunderstand me, Miss Clonmell, I beg; I only tried to lay before you a possible point of view—it may be a wholly erroneous

one. But you know people of great charm have also great responsibilities, and it seems to me that sometimes—sometimes you are apt to forget how your graciousness may raise false hopes."

"Hopes of what? In the name of common sense what is the man talking about?" Lallie cried despairingly. "Do you mean that if I kiss my hand to a boy he will promptly hope I'll kiss *him* in a day or two?"

"That's precisely what I do mean, only I shouldn't have dared to say so," Mr. Johns replied emphatically.

"Oh, the boys have got far more sense than you give them credit for. Good gracious, what's that bell?"

Mr. Johns hastily dragged his watch from his pocket.

"Do you know it's a quarter past two and I'm due to play for the town on their ground at three."

"And luncheon will all be gone, and I'm so hungry," Lallie wailed. "You see it was nearly half-past one when I came in, and then Miss Foster was so disagreeable and drove us both

out of the house, and we walked and walked; and now what'll we do?"

"I, at any rate, must fly and change. If I take a pony trap down to the ground I'll just do it."

"And you've had no lunch! Oh, I am so distressed!"

"That doesn't matter in the least, I'll snatch a biscuit and a bit of chocolate. When I'm in training I often do without lunch."

"Run then, Mr. Johns; never mind me. If you sprint a bit you'll be at B. House in five minutes."

"Will you not think me very rude?"

"Don't waste time talking—run!"

Mr. Johns ran, and Lallie followed very slowly, wrapped in thought.

CHAPTER XIII

TONY had been playing fives and only managed to change just in time for the boys' dinner. Lallie's seat, at his right hand, was vacant, and he concluded that she was lunching with the Wentworths. Miss Foster sat at another table, and he had no opportunity till the meal was over of asking her what had become of his guest.

Mr. Johns' absence, without warning or explanation, certainly did surprise him, for Mr. Johns was the least casual of men and prided himself upon never being late for, or absent from, any duty whatsoever. It never occurred to Tony to connect his absence with Lallie's.

Tony had promised to take Lallie to the match in the afternoon, but had that morning been unexpectedly summoned to Oxford on rather important business, and the half-holiday made it possible for him to go.

He noticed that Miss Foster, contrary to her usual custom, went straight to the drawing-room directly after lunch, and he followed her there with his question as to the whereabouts of his guest.

Miss Foster stood on the hearthrug in front of the fire—luncheon was always earlier on half-holidays, and it was not yet two-thirty. She looked more than usually formidable, and Tony trembled before her. As he asked his question she waved him to a chair with a majestic motion of the hand.

"Please sit down, Mr. Bevan," she remarked, in a hard voice. "I want to speak to you on this very subject. I have no idea where Miss Clonmell is. She flounced out of the house in a passion because I *had* to speak to her about flirting with the boys; and I believe, but I am not certain on this point—I believe that Mr. Johns accompanied her, which explains his absence."

Tony did not sit down. On the contrary he remained for a full minute exactly where he was, just inside the half-open door, and stared amazedly at Miss Foster. In perfect silence he

shut the door and crossed the room till, standing beside her on the hearthrug, he said slowly:

"I don't think I quite understand; did you say that in consequence of something you had said to her Miss Clonmell left the house?"

"Not for good, Mr. Bevan; don't look so anxious. She was in a temper because I found fault with conduct that I know you, also, would be the first to reprobate."

Miss Foster spoke rather nervously. Tony's face was quite expressionless, but there was an indefinable something in his excessively quiet manner that caused her for the first time to question whether she had been quite wise.

"I'm afraid I must ask you to explain exactly what has happened, Miss Foster. I can't imagine any conduct on the part of Miss Clonmell that could call for an expression of opinion so adverse as to drive her from my house, even temporarily. And I cannot conceive it possible that you should so address her if she was, as you say, accompanied by Mr. Johns."

"Mr. Johns was not with her. He happened to be following me as I came down the stairs. I did not see him when I spoke. What

happened was this: I found Miss Clonmell standing at the window of the staircase trying to attract the attention of three of the bigger boys by kissing her hand to them—a most——"

"My dear Miss Foster," Tony interrupted irritably, "how very absurd. You must have misunderstood the whole occurrence. I've known Miss Clonmell since she was a baby, and she is the very last girl in the world to try to 'attract' any one's attention. She doesn't need to. As to kissing her hand, it's a foreign gesture she has acquired from much living abroad. I don't suppose the most conceited ass of a boy in the whole College would misunderstand her if he saw her."

Tony's face was no longer expressionless, and Miss Foster again experienced that strange little tremor of fear.

"I can assure you, Mr. Bevan, had you seen what I saw, you would not treat the affair so lightly. I beg you will not think I was animated by any personal feeling in what I did."

"Why should you be?" Tony asked simply, looking very hard at Miss Foster the while.

"In speaking as I did to Miss Clonmell I was animated wholly by a desire to do my duty by B. House. The honour of the house is very dear to me."

Miss Foster's voice broke, and Tony was melted at once.

"I am sure it is," he said cordially; "but you must take my word for it that in this instance you have been mistaken. And now, where do you suppose that poor child is?"

"I should say she is almost certainly with Mrs. Wentworth, pouring her fancied woes into a sympathetic ear."

Again Tony bent his searching gaze upon Miss Foster.

"Ah," he said thoughtfully, "that last remark of yours proves conclusively how little you know Lallie. She would no more go and complain of you to any one outside, than she would repeat a confidence or carry a mischief-making tale."

Miss Foster made no reply.

"Well, I must go, but I hope I have made it quite clear to you that you were mistaken; and please remember in future, should any little

difficulty occur, you must come to me and not deal directly with Miss Clonmell. I came to ask you to go with her in my place to the match this afternoon, but in view of what has happened and the fact that Miss Clonmell has not returned, I suppose that is impossible. I shall have to stay the night at Oxford, but hope to be back in time for morning school to-morrow. May I beg you to adopt as conciliatory a manner as possible to Miss Clonmell—even if you cannot bring yourself to apologise to her? She is my guest, you see, and it would be very distressing to me to think she is unhappy in my house. Can I depend upon you in this, Miss Foster?" Tony's voice was so pleading and he looked so unhappy that Miss Foster relented.

"I certainly could not apologise as I feel I was justified in what I did. I shall make no reference whatever to what has passed. I think that will be best; don't you?"

"Much best," said Tony warmly. "Please tell her how sorry I am not to have seen her before I left."

As the door was shut behind him Miss Foster exclaimed:

"Oh, you poor, dear, duped, deluded, man!"

Meanwhile Lallie still strolled slowly up and down the bit of road where she had rested with Mr. Johns. A soft rain began to fall and she had no umbrella, but she was unconscious of the fact. Physically she was tired and chilled, and really faint from hunger. Mentally, now that her anger and indignation had cooled, she was depressed, but inclined to think she had exaggerated the importance of the whole affair.

"A storm in a teacup," thought Lallie, "and I've gone and complicated the whole thing by vanishing in the society of Paunch. Awfully decent of him to come with me, but Tony will wonder. He'll set Germs in her place, but he'll ask me what it was all about, and if he discovers that Germs and I are not the dear friends he pictures us, he'll worry, and to be a worrying guest is what I can't bear. I wonder what I'd better do?"

For a whole hour Lallie walked up and down that little bit of road in the rain, resting at intervals upon the exceedingly wet green seat, till at last the grey twilight of the short November afternoon began to close about her. A

passing man looked so hard at her that she grew nervous and set off at a great pace for B. House.

Tony was worried and distressed. His interview with Miss Foster had revealed to him a state of matters he had, it is true, once or twice dimly conjectured: always putting his misgivings from him as unfair and ungenerous to Miss Foster. He kept his hansom waiting till the last minute in the hope that Lallie would return before he had to go.

With the excuse of getting her to keep Val till he was safely out of the house, he sought the matron and begged her to see that tea was taken up to Miss Clonmell's room directly she came in, and that her fire should be lit at once. He hung about looking so miserable and undecided, that Matron, who had heard the whole story of the why and wherefore of Lallie's absence from Ford—how do servants always know everything that goes on?—was emboldened to remark consolingly:

"It will be all right, sir; these little storms soon blow over. We all know Miss Foster is just a little bit difficult at times; but she means

the best possible, and it soon passes. I'll look after Miss Clonmell myself; you may depend upon me. She's a sweet young lady and we're all devoted to her."

This was exactly what Tony wanted, and he departed somewhat comforted.

As he was getting into his cab Matron watched him from the window, and poor Val, whining dismally, paws on the window-sill, watched him too. As the cab vanished out of the drive Matron leant down and patted Val, remarking:

"After all, what's thirty-seven? A man's at his best then, and none the worse because he has always been so busy that he doesn't even know what's the matter with him when he's got it—rash out all over him—got it badly."

Thus it was that when Lallie returned to B. House, front door, front hall, front stairs, though her boots were dreadful, she found a lovely fire in her bedroom and Matron there arranging a little tea-table beside the arm-chair on the hearth. Moreover Matron insisted on her changing everything there and

then, and helped her to do it, finally dosing her with ammoniated quinine before she would give her any tea. She asked no questions of Lallie, but while the girl devoured crisp toast and a boiled egg, entertained her with various items of College news, among them that there was a case of scarlet fever in one of the houses.

"Isn't Miss Foster in a dreadful state?" asked Lallie.

"Well, she's worried and anxious, but so are we all. It's not the right term for it either, and the boy can't have brought it back with him—it's too late in the term—so the question is where did he get it? One always dreads an epidemic of any kind in a large school. We haven't had a real bad one for four years, and then it was in the summer term, which was better. It's always so much easier to get people well in summer."

"I got it that time too. Of course Paddy came back with it. Three holidays in succession he came back with something, and gave it to me every time; and he was so sick to have it in the holidays instead of missing school. But

I should think this house is pretty safe. I never smelt so many disinfectants in my life till I came here—Come in!"

Miss Foster followed her knock, and she heard Lallie's last words.

The fire, lit three hours before its proper time; the tea-table; the presence of Matron; above all the certainty from the few words she had overheard that she, herself, was the subject of their discourse, all combined to rob her manner of any geniality she might have intended to impart to it. So annoyed was she that Matron should have taken upon herself to give Lallie tea without her—Miss Foster's orders, and that Lallie, as she concluded, had actually lit her own fire in the middle of the afternoon without by your leave of any sort, that she found nothing to say but:

"You're back I see, and have had tea—are you unwell?"

"Thank you, no," Lallie answered with quite equal frigidity, "but I was tired and hungry and very wet, and Matron was kind enough to bring me some tea."

"Mr. Bevan asked me to tell you that he has

been unexpectedly called to Oxford and will not be back to-night."

"Won't you sit down, Miss Foster? Must you go, Matron? Thank you so much. Matron told me Tony had to go; it was he who asked her to see that I had tea. I hope it has not been troublesome?" Lallie added politely, rising from her chair.

Miss Foster stood in the middle of the room, large, remote, unapproachable; manifestly disapproving.

"I shall esteem it a favour, Miss Clonmell, if, in future, you will let me know beforehand when you intend to be absent from a meal."

"Certainly, Miss Foster; then I may as well tell you now that I shall not be home for luncheon to-morrow. I'm so glad you reminded me. Won't you sit down?"

Lallie herself sat down again in the big deep chair; so large was it that she almost seemed to lie down in it as she leaned back and stared fixedly at the fire. She looked so comfortable, so entirely at her ease, that Miss Foster simply longed to give this impudent girl a piece of her

mind, but the events of the early afternoon had somewhat shaken her serene faith in the innate wisdom of her instincts. For years she had religiously tended the flame of her self-confidence till it burned with a steady radiance upon the altar of her beliefs. To-day, however, the flame had been blown upon by an adverse wind of criticism; it flickered until its light resembled a will-o'-the-wisp rather than the clear light of reason she had always supposed it to be. Even the sight of the denuded eggshell upon Lallie's empty plate, annoying anachronism at that hour though it was, could not stir Miss Foster to engage in open conflict.

The graceful little figure in the loose white dressing-gown, lolling in the chair, plainly awaited the first onslaught. Lazy and luxurious, Lallie looked sideways at Miss Foster under her long lashes and said sweetly:

"Do sit down: you look so uncomfortable standing there."

"No, thank you"; and in spite of herself Miss Foster replied quite civilly. "I only came to deliver Mr. Bevan's message. Do you think

you will be well enough to come down to dinner?"

"I assure you I am not in the least ill. I will come down most punctually. But, if you will excuse me, I will not change till it's time to dress. I have letters to write and will do them here by this nice fire. Thank you so much for coming to inquire for me."

Miss Foster nearly answered: "I did nothing of the kind," but again mistrust of the "will-o'-the-wisp" prevented her, and she sailed out of the room without another word.

Lallie thrust out her little feet to the warmth and laughed.

"Dinner alone with Paunch and Germs will be rather a silent meal," she reflected, "unless we discuss the probabilities of scarlet fever, which we are sure to do. I'll finish Tony's waistcoat this evening, for to-morrow I shall be out all day. Tony will be so annoyed with me to-morrow that he'll forget all about the stupid little stramash to-day. I hate to vex him, but I know if he guessed half I have to bear from Germs it would vex him far more; and if he got questioning me I might let out some-

thing, and for all his quiet ways Tony is very observant. Germs was very civil this evening. I wonder why? I suppose poor old Tony gave her a dressing down, but it would hurt him frightfully to do it. She really is so splendid in the house, and he does love to live at peace with all his fellow creatures. He'd never enjoy a row as I do; but then, he's as English as ever he can be. It's quite suitable that he should find fault with a harum-scarum like me, that won't hurt him; but it's upsetting in the extreme to run against such a solid body as old Germs, all knobs and hard things that hurt when you charge into her. . . . I hope Mr. Ballinger won't look upon it as encouragement if I ride Kitty to-morrow. After all, why shouldn't I? We lent him a horse several times when he was over in Kerry last spring, and it's much safer to lend me a horse than him. I wish he was big and benevolent like Tony. You always feel you could lean against Tony and he'd stand steady as a rock. If you leant heavily against Mr. Ballinger he might collapse. Tony really is a very great dear, he's so big all round—I hate to vex

him—but perhaps it'll clear the atmosphere a bit. I wish Mr. Ballinger looked less like a passenger when he's outside a horse. . . . I wonder——"

Lallie had ceased to wish or wonder, for she was fast asleep.

CHAPTER XIV

LALLIE came down to breakfast in her habit. Miss Foster did not ask where she was going or why she was riding so early, but contented herself with a remark to the effect that the very short and skimpy habits now in vogue were singularly ungraceful and unbecoming. Lallie replied that the shortness of the habit mattered very little if only the boots below it were irreproachable, and that after all a habit was not for walking in and that it was better to look a bit bunchy on foot than to be dragged if you happened to be thrown. Whereupon Miss Foster made a complicated sort of sound, something between a snort and a sniff, and the meal proceeded in silence.

Only by going straight into College from the station could Tony take his class at the proper time, but immediately morning school was over he rushed down to B. House, hoping to find Lallie and take her up to watch the pick-up.

His letters were spread out on the hall table, and one, conspicuous from the fact that it was unstamped, caught his eye at once. He recognised the little upright writing so like Fitzroy Clonmell's.

As he read, Tony's honest face flushed, then paled to a look of pain and perplexity.

"Tony, dear," it ran, "I've disobeyed you and gone to the opening meet after all. I've not gone alone, and I assure you all will be well. Yesterday, in the town, I met a hunting friend of whom we saw a good deal last season, and he tempted me with a charming little mare whose clear destiny it was to carry me once; anyway—I fell—I gave in. His name is Ballinger—he is quite a nice man; but he doesn't ride a bit better than you, Tony, dear, so except as an escort I don't fancy I shall see much of him.

"This morning I had a letter from the Chesters up at Fareham, and they have asked me to go from to-morrow till Tuesday. They want me to sing at a Primrose meeting on Saturday; *that* I know you won't mind: it will get rid of me for a few days, and give you all a rest. Try not to be cross with me. I'm a tiresome wretch, I know, but I am also your loving Lallie."

Very deliberately Tony folded the letter, put it back in the envelope, and into his breast-pocket. He gathered up the rest of his letters and went to his study, but he made no attempt to read them. He forgot that he ought to go and watch the pick-up. He sat down by his desk, staring straight in front of him at nothing.

Evidently, he reflected, Lallie was unhappy in B. House; glad to get away. She was afraid he might say something to her about yesterday, and regardless of his expressed wish, nay his command, so far as he could be said to exercise any authority over her, she had disobeyed him. It had never so much as entered the realm of possibilities that she could defy him, and he was hurt. Never until that moment did he realise how much he counted upon her steady affection. He had always been so sure that he and Lallie thoroughly understood each other. From the time, when a little baby in her nurse's arms, she would hold out her own, struggling to be "taken" by the tall, shy undergraduate; throughout the somewhat stormy years of her childhood, when he was ever her confidant and her ally; during the

many holidays he spent with Fitz and his family in Ireland, till the day, two years ago, when he first beheld her in a long frock with her clouds of dusky hair bound demurely round her head, and became aware with a little shock of foreboding that Lallie was growing up—never had he doubted her. And when he had got accustomed to her more grown-up appearance he speedily discovered that the real and essential Lallie was unchanged, that she was just as kind and merry and easily pleased, just as warm hearted and quick tempered, as neat fingered and capable and unexpected, as when her frocks reached barely to her knees.

"If I had seen her yesterday I don't believe she would have done this," Tony thought to himself; "it's not like her somehow to take the opportunity of my being away to do what she knows I would have done my best to prevent had I been at home. And this young Ballinger—he's no fit guardian for Lallie out hunting. Confound him! I wish he had stayed in his own shire. Fitz said I was not to discourage him, but I'm convinced he never meant she was to go out hunting with him. I sup-

pose he is going to these Chesters, too; probably that's why she's going. I know nothing about the young man, but, like Charles Lamb, 'I'll d—— him at a venture.' It's too bad of Fitz shelving his parental responsibilities like this. Suppose anything happened to her to-day——"

This thought was so disquieting that Tony got up and walked about the room. Finally he opened and read his letters. Then Miss Foster came and added to his anxieties by informing him that A. J. Tarrant, a new boy, had that morning started a bad feverish cold and complained of sore throat.

"No rash yet," Miss Foster added gloomily, "but of course we've isolated him."

Altogether Tony wished he could have stayed in Oxford. Yet the day seemed very long, and when half-past five at last arrived Tony actually sprinted from the College to B. House.

A great wave of sound met him as he opened the front door. Lallie was playing the overture to *Tanhaüser*. It certainly was neither meek nor repentant music. Nevertheless Tony ejaculated "Thank God!"

He opened the drawing-room door very gently. The ruddy firelight glowed and gloomed in waves of flame and shadow, but the opening of the door let in a long shaft of light from the hall, and with a final crash of chords Lallie turned on the piano stool, demanding:

"Is it you, Tony?"

"I didn't need to ask if it was you, and it was a great relief, I assure you. Had you a good day?"

Out of the shadows Lallie came forward into the ruddy circle of light.

"Your voice doesn't sound quite pleased with me," she said. "I must see your face to make sure. Please switch on a light and let me see."

She laid her little hands upon his shoulders and looked up searchingly into his face. The bright glare of the electric light made Tony blink, and he was so inexpressibly glad to see her again that his joy wholly crowded out the reproachful expression he had intended his homely features to assume.

He felt an overwhelming desire to take her in his arms, kiss her, and implore her

to swear she would never go away again. It was only the certainty that she would kiss him back with the best will in the world, probably bursting into tears of repentance on his shoulder, that restrained Tony. He felt that it would not be playing the game. So very gently, with big hands that trembled somewhat, he removed those that lay so lightly on his shoulders and said, in a matter-of-fact voice:

"Naturally I was anxious. You see I thought we had agreed that there was to be no hunting until we heard from your father; and how could I tell how this—Mr. Ballinger might have mounted you?"

Lallie clasped her hands loosely in front of her, and stood before Tony with downcast eyes, and he forgot all about the matter under discussion in admiring her eyelashes.

"I didn't exactly promise," she murmured; then louder: "no, that's mean of me, and untruthful; I broke my word. I knew you wouldn't wish me to go—but I went—and I enjoyed it—rather. Not quite so much as I expected, though the little mare went like a

bird. It was quite a short run; I was back here by three o'clock."

"Who brought you back?"

"Who brought me back? My dear, good Tony, I'm not a parcel nor a passenger; I came back. I studied the ordnance map of this district that's hanging in your study for a good hour last night. It was broad daylight when the run was over, and it's a very good country for signposts. I returned. Did you see Mr. Ballinger's cards in the hall? He came fussing here to see that I was all right when I was in the middle of changing, and he dutifully asked for Miss Foster, but she'd gone to the sewing-meeting for the Mission—I *ought* to have been there; I forgot all about it; I'm so sorry—and she's not back yet, so I sent down word that I was perfectly all right and *resting*, so he went empty away, poor man, longing for tea, I've no doubt; so must you be, we'll have it brought in here, Miss Foster won't be back till six. Some one's reading a paper to them while they sew, poor things! I'll have another tea with you, Tony. No lunch yesterday, no lunch to-day, and to-morrow will be the third day,

though Mr. Ballinger did bring me a beautiful box of sandwiches, but I had no time to eat them."

"Mr. Ballinger! Why should he bring you sandwiches? Why didn't you ask Matron for some?"

"Oh, you dear goose! How could I ask for sandwiches when I was supposed to be going out to lunch. What would Miss Foster have said? Do you think anybody will tell her I went out hunting all by my gay lonesome?"

"It depends how many people knew you in the field."

"Ah, there you touch me on a tender spot. With the exception of one old curmudgeon who used to hunt sometimes with the "Cockshots" at Fareham last year, there was no one I knew at all, and he rode all round me staring, and then grunted out, 'Where's your father, Miss Clonmell?' I passed him at the first fence, that's one comfort; but you're right, Tony—I missed Dad. People stared at me. It was all right when the hounds were running, I forgot everything and everybody but the fun and excitement, but at the meet it was horrid. Is

your tea nice? Oh, it is good to have you back again!"

"And you prove your joy at my return by going off to-morrow!"

"That's only for the week-end. I always promised them to help at their old meeting—and me a Home-Ruler—isn't it an anomaly?"

"I didn't know that your politics were so pronounced."

"You might guess I'd be 'ag'in the Government,' whichever party's in power. Neither really cares a jot for Ireland. I think the Tories are perhaps the less hypocritical of the two. But any sort of a political meeting is fun. I always long to shout, and boo, and kick the floor. I think all the disturbances they're able to make is what is so supremely attractive about the Suffragettes."

"Are you a Suffragette as well as a Home-Ruler? I shall begin to be quite afraid of you."

"I *should* have been a Suffragette if I might have gone to meetings, carried banners, or thumped on a gong to disturb Mr. Winston Churchill, but Dad was quite stuffy about it, and put down his foot—really put down his

foot with a stamp; fancy Dad!—and forbade me to have anything to do with any of them, so what was the use? It wasn't the vote I wanted."

"Fitz really has, upon occasion, wonderful flashes of common sense, even in his dealings with you."

"Now don't you be pretending to think Dad spoils me, for you know very well he does nothing of the kind. He has never been petty nor interfering, but in things that really matter, I'd no more think of disobeying him than——"

"Of going out hunting without asking his permission," Tony suggested mildly. "And since we have approached the subject of your general submissiveness, might I suggest that you fall in with one little regulation of mine, mentioned on the very first evening you came. Do you remember my asking you not on any account to use the boys' part of the house?"

"Well, neither I have, *ever*."

"What about the back staircase?"

Lallie flushed angrily and began indignantly, "It wasn't my—"; then suddenly she stopped

and said with studied gentleness, "I'm sorry, Tony; you did forbid me, but I quite forgot that those stairs came under your ban."

Tony smiled at her.

"That's all right then. You'll remember in future. In some ways, Lallie, you are very like a boy."

"Good ways, I hope?" her voice was anxious.

"Some of them are quite good. Some of them—well, they are apt to get other people in trouble. See what was sent to me by the incensed master to whom the remarks refer," and Tony held out to her a large sheet of lined paper, closely written in her own neat little upright writing. The first few lines comprised a decorous statement to the effect that "Marlborough underrated the difficulty of managing a coalition. In his necessary absence abroad this difficult operation was in the hands of Godolphin, always a timid minister without any real political convictions," when suddenly the style of the Reverend J. Franck Bright lapsed into the wholly indefensible statement that "cross old Nick is a silly old Ass," and

this was repeated line after line throughout nearly half a page.

Lallie gasped, then burst into uncontrollable laughter, exclaiming:

"It's Cripps's lines. He told me he had to do five hundred, and that no one ever looked at them, so I said I'd do three hundred for him as he wanted awfully to play fives that day. So I copied the dry old History Book till I was sick to death of the long words, and then in the middle I put that in just to cheer things up. What had I better do? Go and see Mr. Nichol, or what? He simply must not punish Cripps. He knew nothing whatever about it, poor boy. I sent him the lines in a neat bundle, and I don't suppose he ever looked at them."

"As it happened it was Mr. Nichol who looked at them, for Cripps omitted the very simple precaution of putting his own pages on the top, and as his writing in no way resembles yours, Mr. Nichol naturally suspected extraneous assistance. He turned the pages over and came upon the one you have in your hand—your capital 'A's' simply jump to the eye. Naturally he was much annoyed, and I am

sorry to say he describes your friend Cripps as 'a surly, insubordinate fellow,' and demands that he should be starred."

"But he can't be starred, for he didn't do it."

"That, very naturally, Cripps did not explain; and after all he is responsible for the lines he gives up."

"Tony, have you seen Cripps?"

"I have."

"Oh, what did you say?"

"I told him that he was a lazy young dog, and ought to do his lines himself; that I hadn't an ounce of sympathy with him, and that he deserved all he got and more; but I need hardly say I did not send him to the Principal with the suggestion that his prefect's star should be taken from him."

"Oh, Tony, I hear Miss Foster; quick—ought *I* to run out and see Mr. Nichol? I'm not a bit afraid of him."

"I think that the matter may now rest in oblivion; only let me offer you one bit of sound advice. If you are charitable enough to help any poor beggar with his lines, write large;

it's a fearful waste of energy to do neat little writing like that—eight words to a line is the regulation thing—and, for Heaven's sake refrain from personal remarks."

"Tony, you are a real dear. I will fly now, for Miss Foster may want to talk to you about the house."

Lallie darted at Tony, dropped a hasty kiss on the top of his head, and fled across the room, opening the door to admit Miss Foster, who had removed her outdoor things. She never came into a sitting-room before going upstairs; she considered it slovenly.

Tony folded the large closely written sheet of paper containing the reiterated animadversions upon the intelligence of Mr. Nichol senior, put it in his pocket, and rose to place a chair for Miss Foster, who regarded the tea things with a look of acute distress.

"I took the opportunity," Tony remarked, "of speaking to Miss Clonmell on the subject you mentioned to me yesterday afternoon, and —er—I reminded her that I had on her first arrival asked her on no account to use the boys' part of the house." Here Tony made a little

pause, as though he expected Miss Foster to make some observation. "I confess that the fact of her being on that staircase at all did surprise me," he added meditatively, looking full at Miss Foster with kind, beseeching eyes.

That lady flushed and sat up very straight in her chair, but she did not meet his gaze.

"What explanation did Miss Clonmell give?" she asked.

"None; she expressed regret that she had forgotten my prohibition, but said that she did not suppose that staircase came under it, though why, I can't imagine."

Again Miss Foster felt herself encompassed by that glance, so full of dumb, entreating kindness. This time she raised her eyes to his and met them fairly as she said slowly:

"Perhaps I am somewhat to blame for Miss Clonmell's presence upon that staircase, though you may imagine I never dreamt of the use to which she would put it. I confess that it never occurred to me as being in any way objectionable during the day. The boys never go up or down, and she often has such exceedingly

muddy boots—I may have even suggested she should go that way. I am sorry——"

"It doesn't matter in the least really," Tony said heartily, and his whole face beamed. "Thank you very much for explaining."

He did not add that it was just what he had suspected from the first moment that Lallie's frivolous conduct was revealed to him; but he meant Miss Foster to own up, and she had owned up. Had she failed to do so Tony could never have respected her again.

"As to Lallie," he reflected tenderly, "you never know what she'll do next, but there are things you can depend on her not doing, and that's to try and drag any one else into the unpleasant results of her vagaries. She'll never go back on any one, never make mischief; and who the devil is Ballinger that he should have all this?"

CHAPTER XV

THAT evening Lallie went into the study to say good-night to Tony. He was reading by the fire, and she came and sat on the floor at his feet, leaning back against his knees as she had done on the evening he corrected papers in the drawing-room. The green silk bag was slung over her arm, but her work was allowed to remain therein, and for once she was content to let her hands lie idle.

"I've come early," she announced, "because if you're not very busy I'd like a little chat. I've turned out the lights and shut the door, for Miss Foster's not coming down again, she says. Isn't it funny to like to go to bed so early?"

"She gets up early, I expect; and perhaps she's very tired at night. Wouldn't you like a cushion or something, don't you find the floor very hard?"

"I'm quite comfortable, thank you. Now listen to me, Tony. Do you think I'm getting

to an age when I'd be better with a home of my own?"

With a mental ejaculation of "Ballinger!" Tony adjusted his mind to the question, saying quickly:

"But surely you've got that already."

"No, Tony; that's just what I have not got. As long as old Madame was alive it was all right. Dad came and went as he pleased, but there was always the house for Paddy and me, whether we were in France or in Ireland. But lately I've begun to feel I'm a bit of a drag on Dad; you know how restless he is sometimes, how unexpected——"

"It's a family failing, Lallie," Tony interrupted.

"And, you see, when he rushes off he won't leave me alone in whatever house we happen to be in, and Aunt Emileen seems no comfort to him unless he's in the house along with her; and there's all the fuss of arranging for me, and I'm sent off here and there on visits, whether I like it or not; and I begin to feel that I've no abiding place at all."

"Is your visit here one of the 'nots'?"

"Now that's nasty of you. You know I meant nothing of the kind, and I jumped for joy when Dad said I should come to you for all these months; but when Dad has been home for a bit and the first delight in having me again has worn off, he'll want to be wandering. If it's wandering I can do too, that's all right. I love going about with Dad, but if it's somewhere that he doesn't care to take me, like this time, then it'll all come over again—the placing out—and I hate it."

"But, Lallie, most young people like plenty of change and variety; the one thing they cannot away with is monotony. That's what most of them, girls especially, complain of."

"Tony, I'm going to make a confession." Lallie turned half round, and leaning an elbow on his knee lifted her face, earnest and serious, so that she might look into his. "I'm *fond* of a house. I like housekeeping, and pottering, and looking after things, and ordering dinner, and sewing, and mending, and arranging flowers, and cooking if I want to, and I *can* cook well; and you can't do any of these things in other people's houses—at least, only the sewing part."

"I'm sure you may cook here if you wish to. I'll undertake to eat anything you make if it's really good."

"Oh, it's not that. I don't mean that I'd like to be always cooking, but I like to feel that I've got a house to look after—my own house. I'd be perfectly happy if Dad wanted a house, but he doesn't. He kept it up for Paddy and me when we were small because he thought it was the right thing to do; but now he doesn't seem to think it so necessary. Poor man, he's too young to have grown-up children, Tony, and that's a fact. He has small patience with Paddy, because, you know, their interests clash. It's different with a woman, the younger she is the prouder is she to have grown-up sons and the cleverer she thinks herself that they are grown up. Don't you think I'm right?"

"Your generalisation," Tony began deliberately, when Lallie interrupted by pinching his knee and exclaiming:

"Now, none of the schoolmaster, I won't have it."

"As I was about to remark when you interrupted me, what you say has a certain amount

of truth in it, but your father has not yet returned from India. When he does return he may not feel the slightest inclination for wandering; at any rate, not for some considerable time—so why worry?"

"I should like to feel settled and secure."

"My dear Lallie, you'll never feel settled, you're not that sort; and as to security, pray in what way do you feel insecure at present?"

Lallie removed her elbow from Tony's knee, she leant back against him again so that he could not see her face, and said, very low:

"I feel insecure because in the course of the next few weeks I'll have to make up my mind definitely one way or other, and whichever way it is, it seems to me I shall regret it."

Again the whole of Tony's mentality fairly cried the name of Ballinger aloud, and although the stillness in the quiet room was so great that you might have heard a pin drop it seemed that his thought must have reached Lallie, for she broke the silence by saying in quite a different tone:

"I wish you had met Dad's friend, Mr. Ballinger, Tony; I'd like to know what you think of him."

"That can be easily managed; we'll ask him to dinner when you come back."

"He is going to the Chesters, you know."

"I didn't know, but I'm glad to hear it for your sake, since you like him."

"Then you don't think I'd be better in a home of my own—married, I mean," said Lallie with startling bluntness.

"I never said anything of the kind."

"Well, you didn't seem to smile upon the notion."

"The notion, as you call it, appears to me in itself quite admirable, if not exactly novel; but you would need to make sure, wouldn't you? that the husband—I think a husband is included in your scheme of felicity—is in keeping—in the picture as it were."

Tony's voice was dry as that in which he instilled the rules of prosody into his form. In fact it was less impassioned, for on occasion he waxed eloquent though vituperative when dealing with that form's Latin prose.

Again Lallie turned half round and leant her elbow on his knee. Again her grey eyes searched his face, apparently in vain, for some clue to the tone in which he spoke.

"I wish I was a rich widow," she said vindictively, "with a nice little place of my own, then there'd be no bother at all, and you could come and stay with me and arrange cricket matches all the summer holidays. I'd put up that eleven you always go off with, and we'd have a cricket week and lovely times."

"The prospect is certainly pleasing," Tony remarked, without enthusiasm; "but it seems to me a little callous on your part to be so anxious to kill off your husband before ever you've tried one."

"Do you think Mr. Johns would make a nice husband?" Lallie asked in a detached, impersonal sort of way.

"Good heavens! How should I know? I hope he won't think of being any one's husband for years to come. He couldn't keep a wife; for one thing, he's too poor."

"Oh, but he is sure to get on; he'll be a headmaster some day. You'll see. I never

met a young man who was more wrapped up in his profession. He's influencing boys all day long."

"By Jove! is he though? I'm glad to hear it."

"I think he'd be a very *kind* husband," said Lallie, "but a bit boring sometimes. I suppose I'd better be thinking of bed. You haven't helped me much, Tony," and Lallie arose and stood in front of him, slender and upright, in her straight green gown. Tony rose too.

"I don't quite know what you wanted me to say, Lallie, but I'd like to say this: Don't you marry anybody for the sake of having a house of your own. Your mother's daughter is capable of something finer and better than that. I cannot in all my experience recall such a happy marriage as hers. Child, there is such a thing. Don't you believe people who say that respect, and affection, and mutual suitability, and all the rest of it are one atom of good if you're not in love with the man. You spoke to-night of your father's restlessness. Do you think he would have been like that if your mother had lived? It was simply that he

had the most perfect home man ever had on this earth; and when she was taken away from him the wrench destroyed his will-power, and he has been at the mercy of his impulses ever since. Never judge him, Lallie; he can't help it."

The tears welled up into Lallie's eyes.

"I don't judge him," she faltered; "it's myself I judge, and blame, and yet I tried so hard to make his home happy and comfortable, so that he'd want to stay with me; and I can make a nice home, I really can, but it wasn't enough for Dad. Last winter I thought we were settled. He liked the hunting, and we were so happy, and had such jokes about Aunt Emileen, but it all came to an end—and *he'd like me to marry*, Tony; that's the har-r-d part."

The big tears hung on Lallie's lashes, the corners of her mouth drooped, and she looked so small, and pathetic, and forlorn that Tony fairly turned his back upon her and leant his arms on the chimneypiece, staring with the greatest interest at the shield bearing his college arms, which he did not see.

"I am convinced," he said, and his voice was almost gruff, "that your father would hate to think you married anybody simply for the sake of getting married. Of course he would like to see you well and happily married—but——"

"Good-night, Tony," Lallie said meekly.

He turned and shook her outstretched hand and stood at the door watching her as she went slowly up the stairs with drooping head and deep depression in every line of the slender little figure that always looked so much taller than it really was. She never turned her head to look back at him, and Tony shut the door and sat down at his desk with a groan.

Matron was right: he'd got it late, and he'd got it badly. But she was wrong when she informed Val that he didn't know what was the matter with him.

He cursed himself for an old fool; for a betrayer of trust; for a dog in the manger.

Fitz wanted Lallie to marry this Ballinger; told him so. And here was he, Tony Bevan, actually using what influence he had to prevent her doing anything of the kind. Fitz

wouldn't want it unless Ballinger were a good fellow. He knew Ballinger and Tony didn't. Was it likely that Fitz would be anxious for the marriage unless Ballinger was the best of good fellows? And yet, he, Tony, who knew nothing whatever about the man, had interfered. "But she doesn't love him!" cried this old fool, this betrayer of a father's trust.

"How do you know?" sternly demanded the inward mentor; "is she a girl to wear her heart upon her sleeve? She may be deeply in love with him, but won't confess it to herself even, just because he is rich and eligible, and because she would like a home of her own."

"She doesn't seem a bit in love with him," pleaded the fatuous one. "Lallie in love would——"

The mentor shrugged his shoulders and retired, for Tony Bevan had embarked upon a sea of speculation so deliciously problematical, so wholly removed from such sober themes as duty and expediency, that it was hopeless just then by the clearest call to reach ears that were deaf to all but the siren song.

"I wonder," mused Tony, "if I'd met her now for the first time, if she hadn't always put me down as a friend of her father's, worlds away from any touch of sentiment—I wonder if, as a mere man, I might have had a chance. Upon my soul I'd have tried for it."

For a good half hour Tony sat dreaming; then he stooped and patted Val, remarking, "I'm d—d if she's in love with Ballinger," and Val wagged his tail in cordial assent.

CHAPTER XVI

"*From* LALLIE CLONMELL, B. HOUSE, HAMCHESTER COLLEGE, TO FITZROY CLONMELL, c/o MESSRS. KING AND CO., BOMBAY, INDIA.

"MY DARLING DAD,

"It's eleven o'clock at night and I ought to be getting to bed, but it's mail day to-morrow and I'm going to the Chesters at Fareham quite early, so I'll do your letter to-night. I'm sleepy enough, for I've been out with the Hamchester hounds to-day. Mr. Ballinger has come to hunt here, why, I leave you to imagine, and he mounted me and took me. Tony had forbidden me to go till we heard from you, but he went to Oxford; then I met Mr. Ballinger; then I had ever such a row with Miss Foster, and I felt reckless; and as Tony was not there to make me feel conscientious or repentant I went. I didn't enjoy it much, though the day and the little mare and the run were all as good as they could be. Mr. Ballinger is going to the Chesters also. There's a Primrose meeting to-morrow night, and I've got to sing some absurd tum-ti-tum sort of Jingo song

about Empire and Tariff Reform and a large loaf. They call it a 'topical' song over here. I'd much rather sing them 'The Vicar of Bray' or 'Love's Young Dream' or 'Rory O'More,' but they won't let me. I offered to.

"Dad, dear, you will have gathered from my letters that Miss Foster and I do not exactly hit it off. I could forgive her not liking me, though I think it's bad taste on her part, if only she wouldn't treat me as though I were a contagious disease. The boys call her Germs, but indeed it's me that she makes feel a mass of microbes of the most noxious kind. She's rude, Dad, downright rude; and it would be absurd to say she doesn't mean it, for she does. And what's more, she takes care that I know she means it. I wouldn't mind a bit if she was ever so pernicketty and peppery if only she would be kind and pleasant sometimes, but she never is pleasant—to me. And yet I can't help admiring her for the way she looks after B. House. She really loves the boys, and if one of them is the least little bit ill Miss Foster is in a dreadful way. Both she and Tony are very worried just now because a boy is ill. They fear he has got scarlet fever. There has been a case in another house.

"Miss Foster has taken it into her head that I am bad for the boys, and that's one reason

why she dislikes me. In what way I'm bad for them I don't know, and any that I have met seem to like talking to me, but whenever they do, I can see she is worried. I think she likes Tony awfully—but who doesn't? Yet she doesn't seem to make a really comfortable home for him somehow. As for poor Paunch! she hates him as much as she hates me, and never says a civil word to him.

"Paunch and I are great friends; we sit and shiver together in the chill blast of Miss Foster's displeasure, and 'a fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind,' especially Paunch. He is a most earnest young man, Dad; all day long he is thinking of the influence he may be on others, and the result is that Tony, who never thinks about himself at all, makes far more impression when he tells a boy he's a silly young ass than Paunch would if he talked about ideals till Doomsday. It's very odd how the boys really care what Tony thinks; of course they don't say so, but any one can see it. Mr. Johns is awfully good at games, so the boys respect that. The other day I asked Mr. Hamilton, one of the pre's, if Tony ever gave them a 'pi-jaw' as they call it.

"He looked very funny for a minute, and then he said, 'I don't know any one I'd sooner go to than old Bruiser if I was in a very bad

mess.' It wasn't an answer to my question, but it was enlightening all the same. Tony makes me think of those lines at the beginning of 'Stalky':

> "'For they taught us common sense,
> Tried to teach us common sense,
> Truth and God's own common sense,
> Which is more than knowledge.'

"I was reading 'Stalky' last night, and that seemed to me to explain Tony. The queer thing is that both Mr. Johns and Miss Foster, though they love him dearly, think Tony is a bit of a slacker. Miss Foster, because he will not work himself up into a fever whenever there's a rumour of mumps or chicken-pox; and Mr. Johns because Tony never talks about moral training, and never seems to be watching or prying about the boys; and yet I remember Paddy saying that somehow undesirable chaps never come back to B. House, though how or why nobody never knows, and I'm certain Tony's ideals are quite as high as Mr. Johns', although he never talks about them.

"I think it's rather a *great* thing, don't you, to send so many boys out into the world so that they keep straight and work and are useful members of the community, and so that they

remember you and know you'd be awfully sorry if things went wrong. All the years I've known Tony, I've thought it such a pity he was anything so humdrum as a schoolmaster. Since I've been here I don't think that any more. I think it's such a jolly good thing for all the boys who've come under him. I wish he'd had the house all the time Paddy was there; but then, Paddy had him in the holidays, so it didn't matter so much.

"Paddy seems very happy at the Shop. He knows a lot of gunner people outside, and he goes out every Saturday and Sunday, but he's rather sick that they don't ride till their second term.

"Please don't fancy I'm unhappy here, I like it awfully. Every one is as kind and jolly as possible, and the attitude of Germs just gives the necessary touch of excitement to the situation. She positively dislikes music, poor woman, so I must be a trying guest. I'm obliged to practise, for I'm always singing somewhere. The music-hater is decidedly in the minority in this world.

"I'm afraid, Dad, that Mr. Ballinger means to propose again very shortly, and Tony says I ought not to marry any one I'm not really in love with, and I can't imagine myself in love with Mr. Ballinger, though I do like him, really,

he's so kind and nice and says such agreeable things.

"Tony is not so amusing here as at home. He's a tiny bit stiff sometimes. I suppose it's the atmosphere. It must be awful to think all the time about setting an example, like Mr. Johns—so tiring. But he seems to thrive under it, and Tony says he'll be stout if he doesn't take care.

"I hope you'll bring back a lot of nice skins. They're a mangy lot in the drawing-room over in Kerry, some new ones will be a great improvement.

"Please write me longer letters, dear Dad. I'm very homesick sometimes, and I miss Bridget, but she could never have got on with Miss Foster; and if she heard Miss Foster speak nastily to me there would be wigs on the green indeed. It's a good thing Biddy is not here.

"I wonder why extreme monotony in the matter of meals is considered so beneficial to the youthful palate. It wouldn't cost a penny more to have a little variety, but they never do in the houses. There's heaps and heaps to eat, even the boys own that, but it is so dull for them having the same things over and over again. I'd love to go into Tony's kitchen and teach that cook of his how to make real good soup and a proper haricot. Dinner is always

a nice meal, but Miss Foster has no imagination. I wonder what she'd do if she had to keep house for you. She'd probably grovel to you because you'd bully her. Now, as it is, she bullies Tony, and he can't call his soul his own. They say, (Who are they? I hear you ask), well, rumour hath it that if Tony ever wants to get married he'll have to do it in the holidays secretly, and then bring his wife home to have it out with Miss Foster. I can't imagine Tony married, can you? Oh, I'd hate it. I do hope he won't.

"Good-night, my dearest Dad. I'm really quite good here on the whole, though I did disobey Tony about hunting just this once.

"Your own loving daughter,

"LALLIE."

CHAPTER XVII

TARRANT had got scarlet-fever, and very badly too.

He was removed to the fever hospital on Friday, and by Sunday morning it looked as though things would go hardly with Tarrant. There were complications, and the boy seemed to have no power, either mental or physical, to resist the disease.

So ill was he that the Principal went to see him after morning chapel. Tarrant was quite conscious, and made whispered, suitable answers to Dr. Wentworth's kind and serious remarks.

"Keep your heart up," said the Principal just before he left; "remember that we are all thinking about you and praying that you may get well."

"Did they pray for me in chapel?" Tarrant asked.

On being assured that this was so, the boy turned his face to the wall, feeling that all was

over for him. Like a good many older folk who ought to know better, Tarrant thought that to be prayed for in public proved that the case was indeed desperate.

He had been prayed for in chapel!

Only people who were very ill, who were going to die, were ever prayed for in chapel. Chaps had told him so.

There was a chap died in the Easter term, and he'd been prayed for in chapel for a fortnight.

Tarrant was too weak to be much upset. It was a footling thing to do, to die in one's first term, but it couldn't be helped. Rotten luck though! Old Bruiser would be awfully cut up. Fellows had told him how cut up old Nick was when that chap died in his house, and Bruiser was a jolly sight decenter than old Nick.

What ought a chap to think about when he was dying? Religion and that, he supposed. He tried to remember a hymn, but the only hymns that really appealed to Tarrant were those with "*ff.*" against several of the verses, when the Coll. all sang at the tops of their voices and nearly lifted the roof off the chapel.

And somehow he didn't feel very jubilant just then.

Again he tried to think of something soothing and suitable, but the only thing he could remember was a bit of a French exercise—"The nature of Frederick William was harsh and bad." And this he found himself saying over and over again.

The kind nurse bent down to hear what he was muttering, but all she could catch was "harsh and bad," and she wondered if he had been bullied in B. House.

From the nature of Frederick William, Tarrant's wandering thoughts turned to Germs.

What a stew old Germs would be in!

She was kind though; he remembered that with dreamy gratitude. She hated chaps to be ill, and did her level best to make them comfortable. All the house said that. But my aunt! she was afraid of infection, and fever was awfully infectious. Now Dr. Wentworth wasn't afraid, and he had kids. Bruiser wasn't afraid either; but you wouldn't expect Bruiser to be afraid of things. He had a comfortable big hand, had Bruiser. Tarrant wasn't capa-

ble of wishing for much, but he rather wished Bruiser could have stayed. He felt less like floating away into space when Bruiser held him.

What was it Bruiser had said?

"You must buck up, you know. Think of your father and mother in India, how worried they'll be."

Poor mater, it would be a bad knock for her. The pater, too, he'd been at the good old Coll. —his name was up in the big Modern.

Tarrant supposed the chaps would subscribe for a wreath. They did for that other chap. Briggs minor told him. He wondered what sort of a wreath it would be; he hoped it would be nice and large.

What was that hymn they had in chapel last Sunday evening? Ah, he had thought of a hymn at last—

> "Sweet Saviour, bless us ere we go;
> Thy word into our minds instil,
> And make our luke-warm hearts to glow
> With lowly love and fervent will. . . ."

He wished his heart would have glowed, but somehow it refused to do anything of the kind.

It had a nice cheerful tune, that hymn, especially the last two lines—

> "Through life's long day and death's dark night,
> O gentle Jesus, be our light."

Would it be very dark? he wondered. Perhaps for him, seeing his life had been so short, the gentle Jesus of the hymn might see to it that it was not so dark as to be frightening . . .

. . . . .

When Tony Bevan got back from the hospital that afternoon Miss Foster was waiting for him in the hall. She wore a long travelling-cloak and a most imposing hat, and she appeared very much upset. Tony's sad, worn face did nothing to reassure her.

"He is just slipping away," he said sadly, as he followed her into the drawing-room. "There seems no real reason why he should die, but he seems to have no stamina, and they give very little hope. Everything has been done. The nurses are most devoted, the doctors have tried everything. The next few hours will decide it."

"You will have to manage without me for a day or two," Miss Foster said abruptly; "I'm going to that boy. It's just providential that Miss Clonmell is out of the house. I've put on a cotton dress, which can be burnt before I leave the hospital, so can everything I wear in his room, but I'm going. My cab will be here directly. I could never forgive myself or rest easy another hour if I don't go and see after that boy myself. I have no faith in trained nurses, nor much in doctors for the matter of that. I believe they carry about all sort of horrid microbes in their clothes. They never change or disinfect or anything. I've no doubt Tarrant rubbed up against some doctor when he was watching football and caught it from him. I wish all those doctors were forbidden the field; that I do."

Miss Foster spoke very crossly, but there was something underlying her irascible manner suspiciously like tears, and Tony held out his hand to her, saying in an almost inaudible mumble:

"It's very good of you. It's particularly hard for us—the little chap's first term, and

his people so far away. It will be an inexpressible comfort to me to think that some kind woman——"

Tony's voice gave out, and he turned away just as Ford came in to announce that Miss Foster's cab was at the door.

Tarrant dozed and dreamed and then came back to realities with a start; and the queer light feeling of being suspended in space became so acute that he plucked at the sheet to assure himself that there was a bed and that he was lying in it.

A very firm hand closed over his; a smooth hand and soft, but yet with a purposeful quality about it that seemed to send a little intangible current of some kind through his arm right to his very brain, so that he was seized by a quite definite curiosity as to the personality belonging to the hand.

Lazily he opened his tired eyes and looked along the sheet at the hand covering his own.

It was white, with particularly well-tended nails: surely, too, the rings were familiar. He was certain he had seen those rings before, and

had noticed them in the sub-conscious way one does observe such things.

It seemed far too great an effort to raise his eyes so that he could take in the entire figure that sat beside his bed, so he contented himself with looking along the sleeve that belonged to the hand—a grey linen sleeve, and the nurses wore pale blue. Who could this be? With a mighty effort Tarrant lifted his eyes and at the same moment gasped out "Germs!"

It was a very faint little gasp, and Miss Foster, being unaware of her nickname among the boys, thought he said something about "terms," and concluded that he was worrying about his work, which was indeed the very last thing that Tarrant was ever concerned about.

She was about to take her hand away, when the hot little hand within it clutched at it feverishly.

"It's all right, my dear boy, I'm not going away," she said gently.

Tarrant opened his eyes wider. If Germs was here he certainly couldn't have fever, couldn't be infectious. No one was so afraid of infection as old Germs—it was a mania

with her. Could the doctors and everybody have been mistaken? Perhaps he had only a common throat after all. But it was nasty to feel so queer and light. Yes; Germs was still holding his hand. Back again came that beastly old sentence about the nature of Frederick William; he was in French form, and the master said sharply, "Next word, Tarrant," and he awoke with a start, staring with large frightened eyes at Miss Foster, who said:

"Can you hear me, dear boy?"

He made a little inarticulate sound.

"You must rouse yourself," said Miss Foster. "You mustn't give in. You keep a firm hold of me, and never mind French exercises or anything else. You've been dreaming about a French lesson. Now I forbid you to dream about anything of the kind. You're to dream about being strong and well, if you dream at all. But you'd much better just sleep and get rested."

Miss Foster spoke with immense decision, and sat there looking so portly, and solid, and rational that Tarrant began to wonder if he had dreamt of the Principal's visit.

"Was I prayed for in chapel?" he whispered.

"Of course you were," Miss Foster answered briskly; "that's why you are going to get well. Don't you think about yourself at all, leave that to us."

"Haven't I got fever?" Tarrant persisted in his faint husky whisper.

"Of course you have. But that's no reason to give in. Lots of boys have had scarlet fever and are running about now, not a jot the worse for it. But I'm not going to allow you to talk."

"But why," gasped Tarrant, "are you here?"

"Because I choose," Miss Foster replied; "and that's every single question I'm going to answer. Be quiet, like a good boy, and think —if you think at all, but you'd really better not—what you'd like to do when you're allowed to sit up."

"Aren't you afraid you'll catch it?" he insisted.

"Good gracious, no! What does the boy take me for? I'm terrified of infection for the HOUSE—but not for myself. Dear, dear, to think you could imagine that! Now, not another word."

There was a sturdy conclusiveness about Miss Foster that was very reassuring. It was impossible to reflect upon wreaths and funeral services in College chapel while she sat there looking so robust, and capable, and determined. It is probable that no one else could have had quite the same effect upon Tarrant.

It really seemed as though the grip of her firm, capable hand literally held his frail little barque of life to the shore, in spite of the strong backward tide that was drawing it out to sea.

He submitted to this new view of his case. He was too weak to argue with any one. If Germs said he was going to get well he supposed he must be. Besides, he couldn't be so awfully infectious, else she wouldn't be there.

. . . . .

At midnight Miss Foster called Tony up on the telephone.

"We think he is going to pull through," was the message. "He needed cheering up, so it's just as well I came."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE Chesters of Pinnels End were as much an institution in the Fareham neighbourhood as the Abbey Church, itself. Hospitality was a religion with them, and William Chester and Olivia his wife were never so happy as when their big wandering house was absolutely full. They had six grown-up sons scattered about the world who were forever sending their friends to "cheer up the old people," so they were seldom lonely. They were not particularly rich, certainly not smart—the interior of Pinnels was almost conspicuously shabby—but they were the youngest and cheeriest old people imaginable, and their house was comfortable as are few houses. Those who had once enjoyed its entertainment were fain to return with gleeful frequency.

For nearly four hundred years there had been Chesters at Pinnels End—large families of Chesters, and however they may have differed

as to politics, religion, or personal taste, they were supremely unanimous in one matter: they none of them could bear any changes at Pinnels.

Mrs. Chester used to declare that until a carpet there actually fell to pieces and tripped up her husband and sons, she was never allowed to replace it. That done, it was months before they became resigned, years before they consented to regard it with any but the most grudging toleration, and even then it was compared unfavourably with its predecessors.

The party to be assembled at Pinnels consisted of three of the sons—two on leave from India and Egypt respectively; the third an Oxford man who had just taken his degree and was marking time at home while his father sought out an agent with whom to place him to learn estate management—Lallie, Sidney Ballinger, who was asked because he was a neighbour, and because kind Mrs. Chester knew that he would rather be in the same house with Lallie Clonmell than anywhere else on earth. There was Celia Jones, the usual "nice girl" of house parties, who possessed no striking char-

acteristics whatsoever; and the remaining guest was a Mrs. Atwood, the wife of a busy doctor in Carlisle.

Her host would have found it rather difficult to explain Mrs. Atwood's presence. He met her while he and his wife were spending a few days in a house of a mutual friend about a fortnight before; and somehow, although he could never remember exactly how it came about, Mrs. Atwood had extracted an invitation from him for this particular week-end.

"Did you take such a fancy to her, father?" Mrs. Chester asked, when informed of the lady's projected visit. "I didn't care much for her myself, and I shouldn't have thought she was your sort either."

"I can't say I was greatly attracted, though there's something rather pleasing and pathetic about her, and she wanted so badly to fill in those four days between two visits. It's such a deuce of a way back to Carlisle—and she 'longed' so to see Fareham—historic old town, you know—and consulted me about hotels there, and so on. You've often done the same thing yourself; you know you have."

"Oh, I shall be most pleased to see her and, of course I've told her so. Only—I wonder how she'll fit in with the others."

"She'll fit in right enough; the more the merrier."

"I can't imagine Mrs. Atwood merry under any circumstances."

"All the more reason to try and cheer her up," Mr. Chester remarked optimistically, and the subject dropped.

Eileen Atwood was thirty-six years old, and looked at least five years younger. She was tall, slender, and fair, with a graceful, well-set head, large heavy-lidded and generally downcast blue eyes, a small close mouth, and a chin that would have been markedly receding had she not so persistently drooped her head forward. It is only people with firm chins who can afford to carry their heads in the air. She spoke very low, and was fond of discussing what she was pleased to call "psychic things." She herself would have said that she "bore an aura of unhappiness"; and the world in general concluded that Dr. Atwood was not *simpatico*. She had no children nor, apparently, many

domestic claims, for she spent a large portion of her time in paying visits. Simple people considered her intellectual because she used such long and unusual words. Others of proved ability, such as her husband, had a different opinion.

Lallie arrived at Pinnels before luncheon. She left B. House by the first available train in the morning—partly because she knew Tony and Miss Foster to be very anxious about Tarrant, who was to be moved to the hospital that morning, and she thought they would be glad to have her out of the way; and partly because she was quite certain that Sidney Ballinger would not travel by such an early train, and she did not desire him as an escort. When they rode to the meet together he had implored her to give him an idea of what time next day she would travel to Fareham, but she persisted that her plans were too uncertain to admit of any information on this point. Therefore did he choose a train that would get him to Fareham in time for tea at Pinnels End, rightly thinking that this was the usual and agreeable

time to arrive. He nearly lost his train through procrastination in the matter of taking his seat, having walked the whole length of the train several times peering into every carriage in a vain search for Lallie; and he endured a miserable journey, assailed by dismal doubts and fears lest Lallie had changed her mind and decided not to go at all.

It was therefore a great relief when he was ushered into the dark old hall at Pinnels to hear Lallie's voice raised in song in the duet "Thou the stream and I the river," which she and Billy Chester, the would-be land agent, were performing with great enthusiasm.

The drawing-room was almost as dark as the hall, for the lamps had not yet been brought in, and the only lights were from two candles upon the piano and the big fire of logs on the hearth. For years the present owner of Pinnels had been considering the installation of an electric-light plant, but he had never been able to bring himself to such an innovation. "It would pull the old place about," he observed apologetically, "and, after all, lamps are very handy, you can put 'em wherever you want 'em."

Ballinger waited at the open door till the duet had come to a triumphant and crescendoed conclusion, and then preceded the footman bearing tea.

He was the last to arrive, and the various greetings over Mrs. Chester led him over to the fireplace, remarking:

"I think you know everybody here except Mrs. Atwood."

That lady, seated in a particularly dark corner, leant forward, saying in her usual soft tones:

"Mr. Ballinger and I have met before; in fact, we are quite old friends."

"Why did you never tell me?" asked Mrs. Chester, and left them.

Mrs. Atwood was in the shadow, but Ballinger was standing in the circle of red light thrown by the fire, and that may have been the cause of his crimson face as he bent over the lady's hand.

Lallie, standing back in the room beside the piano, noticed that he gave a very perceptible start at the sound of Mrs. Atwood's voice, and that his flushed face betrayed no pleasure at

the meeting, for he shook hands with the lady in somewhat perfunctory fashion and immediately moved back to a chair near Mrs. Chester, who was making tea on the other side of the hearth.

When the lamps were brought in Mrs. Atwood, who wore a most becoming tea-gown, came forth from her corner and went and sat down near Lallie, who shared a deep window-seat with Billy Chester and was squabbling with him for the last toasted scone.

"You are a very wonderful person, Miss Clonmell," she said solemnly.

"I'm glad to hear it," Lallie replied politely. "I've long been of that opinion myself, but hitherto I haven't been able to get people to share it."

"Of course they won't share with you if you're so greedy about keeping things to yourself—what about that last scone?" Billy exclaimed reproachfully.

Mrs. Atwood ignored Billy.

"I suppose you have studied singing seriously?" she continued.

"I'm afraid I'm not very serious about any-

thing. But I love music, if that's what you mean."

"I mean a great deal more than that. You are possessed by it. The true artist always is. Don't you feel every time you sing that you are expressing in the fullest and most perfect form the essential you? That your entity is completed—rounded off as it were; that your very soul becomes tangible in song?"

Billy softly and silently vanished from Lallie's side; and she, wishing with all her heart that Mrs. Atwood would go and talk to some one else, said humbly:

"I'm afraid I don't feel nearly all that. I'm a very prosaic person really, and sometimes the inane words one has to sing—well, they get between me and the music and spoil it; though that, too, is inane enough sometimes."

Mrs. Atwood leant back in her chair and smiled indulgently at Lallie.

"Oh, how I envy you," she exclaimed; "but at the same time I am quite sure that we agree in *diathesis:* that although we may arrive at our conclusions by different methods, they are practically identical. I cannot con-

ceive that you can possess such a power of self-revelation without the artistic temperament, any more than I can allow that I, lacking means of self-expression, must necessarily lack temperament. I feel that we shall have much in common."

Lallie looked as though she feared this confidence on Mrs. Atwood's part was somewhat misplaced and said gravely:

"I should never say that you lacked means of self-expression. You seem to me to have an unusually large vocabulary."

Mrs. Atwood laughed. "Now you are making game of me, and I believe I must have frightened Mr. Chester away—too bad. I suppose you know every one here very well. This is my first visit, you know—all strange except dear Mr. and Mrs. Chester, such kind people! Who is that man sitting so close by her?"

Lallie's seat was considerably higher than Mrs. Atwood's, and the girl looked down at her with a curiously appraising glance.

"I thought I heard you say just before tea that he is an old friend of yours."

Mrs. Atwood laughed nervously.

"Oh, that one! Mr. Ballinger; yes, I know him. I meant the tall one leaning against the chimneypiece."

"That is Mr. Arnold Chester. He was here at lunch, you know."

"So he was, how stupid of me. This lamplight is very confusing."

It seemed that although Mrs. Atwood spoke in her usual subdued tones that Sidney Ballinger heard his name, for he turned right round and saw Lallie sitting in the deep window-seat. Her head was sharply silhouetted against the white casement curtain, and her eyes, star-sweet and serious, met his in mute challenge. He did not see Mrs. Atwood, his eager gaze was concentrated on the little figure in the window. Hastily setting down his empty cup upon the tray he crossed the room and sat down in Billy Chester's vacant place, and not even his pince-nez could conceal the gladness in his eyes.

"When did you arrive?" he asked eagerly; "I've not had the chance to speak to you yet; you might have told me your train——"

Then he saw Mrs. Atwood.

His face changed and clouded, and his sudden pause was so marked that Lallie said hastily:

"I came very early; Mrs. Atwood and I arrived almost at the same time from different directions. It was convenient, for it saved the motor going in twice."

"And gave us an opportunity to become acquainted on our way out," Mrs. Atwood added. She leant back in her low chair and with half-shut eyes lazily looked at the two in the window.

Lallie longed to disclaim any sort of acquaintance with Mrs. Atwood, Ballinger seemed possessed by a demon of glum silence, only Mrs Atwood, in graceful comfort, easily reclining in her deep chair, seemed insensible of any tension in the atmosphere.

Lallie felt intensely impatient at Ballinger's sudden and inconvenient taciturnity. Every one else in the room was talking. Why couldn't he? Why couldn't she? For the life of her she couldn't think of a suitable remark to make. Mrs. Atwood sat very still, a serene little smile just tinging her face with a suspicion of ironical amusement.

Lallie became unendurably restless. She felt that if she sat where she was another minute she would say or do something desperate. To get out of her corner she had to pass in front of her neighbour and almost squeeze behind Mrs. Atwood's chair; with a remark to the effect that it was chilly sitting so far from the fire, she achieved the difficult feat and joined the cheerful group round the tea-table.

"Well?" said Mrs. Atwood.

Ballinger looked at her rather helplessly. He had an irritating habit when embarrassed of holding his hands out in front of him and feebly dangling them from the wrists. He did this now as he remarked obviously:

"I had no idea you were here."

Mrs. Atwood leaned suddenly toward him. "Don't talk banalities," she said almost fiercely. "Have you nothing else to say to me after all these months?"

He pulled himself together. "Well, really" —he spoke as though weighing the question carefully—"I don't know that I have."

"Nevertheless, I shall have something to say to you," said Mrs. Atwood.

CHAPTER XIX

WHEN Sidney Ballinger was at Trinity, Dr. Atwood had a practice in Cambridge. Mrs. Atwood was by way of being guide, philosopher, and friend to a good many undergraduates, and in Sidney Ballinger's case the friendship had assumed proportions quite other than Platonic.

He was flattered and grateful, his feeling for her being a subtle compound of inclination, gratified vanity, and a sort of pleased surprise that he was such a devil of a fellow. For Sidney was not then of much importance either in the world at large or in that smaller world of University life. He was good in the schools and of no use whatever in the athletic set. He did not speak at debates, nor act, nor perform at any of the various Musical Societies; in fact, he was a hard-working, rather simple-minded, inconspicuous young man until Mrs. Atwood got hold of him and taught him to believe

himself complex, unusual, and misunderstood. She could not spoil his work, for he was shrewd enough in some ways, but she did contrive to develop a great deal that was artificial and petty in his character, whereas her feeling for him was as nearly sincere as emotion ever is in a nature that continually poses, as much to quicken its own spirit as to impress others.

They were both young and enthusiastic, but neither of them ever contemplated any very vigorous flight in the faces of the conventional. They saw each other constantly during term time, and often read Swinburne together. In the vacations they wrote long letters, and Sidney went about feeling very superior to the common herd of undergraduates who merely fell in love with people's unmarried sisters during May week.

The Atwoods left Cambridge during Sidney's fourth year there, which may have accounted for his exceedingly good degree. After he was called to the Bar he saw very little of Mrs. Atwood. As she put it, "they drifted apart." She did occasionally come to London, where they would meet, and he listened

sympathetically to her complaints as to the "hebetude" of the inhabitants of Carlisle, but their letters were brief and few; in fact, the whole affair would have died a natural death but for his sudden and unexpected inheritance of his uncle's property. In his case all feeling for Mrs. Atwood, except a mildly reminiscent sort of affectation, was dead, and being sincerely desirous of doing his duty in the new station of life to which he had been called, he laid aside many youthful follies and affections; in fact, he set himself seriously to become the ideal landed proprietor.

On Mrs. Atwood, Sidney's sudden accession to a considerable fortune had quite another effect. Vistas of a hitherto undreamt-of possibility stretched before her; she beheld in imagination the world well lost and herself and Sidney fleeing to sunnier climes in a yacht she would help him to choose. She was a good sailor. He was not, but this she did not know.

Everything would arrange itself. Her "unloving, unloved" husband would doubtless soon get over it and she— But it is fruitless to pursue Mrs. Atwood's reflections. She wrote

many letters to Sidney. To some he replied with matter-of-fact civility, but he left a great many unanswered, especially of late.

Time had precisely opposite effects upon their respective temperaments. The flame of Mrs. Atwood's desire for Sidney burned stronger and fiercer; while in him there remained but a few grey ashes upon the altar of his love. Naturally tidy, he objected even to these frail reminders of the past, and did his best to sweep them away. Then he met Lallie and fell honestly and hopelessly in love. Mrs. Atwood's very existence became a rather annoying trifle—a pin-prick that only occasionally smarted.

When Mrs. Atwood met the Chesters she was beginning to feel desperate. Her last three letters to Sidney were unanswered. When she happened to hear Mrs. Chester say he was to be their guest so shortly, she felt that the hand of destiny was outstretched on her behalf. She promptly set to work to extract an invitation from Mr. Chester, and having succeeded, felt that all would happen as she had pictured. She was convinced that they only needed to

meet once more when their relations would be as they had been in the past—only more so.

"Take ship, for happiness is somewhere to be had," she quoted to herself. She was sure that her happiness lay at Pinnels End, and embarked upon her enterprise with a high heart.

By Saturday evening, the night of the Primrose meeting, the situation was somewhat as follows: Mrs. Atwood, still striving vainly to secure a few minutes alone with Sidney Ballinger; he, moving heaven and earth to draw Lallie away from all the others, without success; Lallie, quite aware of the tactics of both Ballinger and Mrs. Atwood and mischievously delighting in the checkmate of each in turn. She infuriated Mrs. Atwood by her extreme graciousness to Ballinger in public, and drove him to desperation by her desire for Billy Chester's society whenever he hoped to get her to himself.

Mrs. Chester was furious with Mrs. Atwood. She invaded her husband's dressing-room just before dinner to voice her indignation.

"I have no patience with the woman," she exclaimed; "she's a regular spoil-sport. Any

one with half an eye or an ounce of sympathy can see how the land lies between Lallie and young Ballinger, and yet she never leaves them alone for an instant. She seems to me to follow them about on purpose."

"I think you're a bit hard on her. She must go about with some one, you couldn't expect her to stop in her room; and after all, how can she divine that Lallie and Ballinger are in love? They're too well-bred to show it if they are, and you have only your supposition to go on. I think she has taken rather a fancy to Lallie, like the rest of us."

"Fancy!" Mrs. Chester repeated scornfully. "If there is one person in this house that Mrs. Atwood cordially dislikes, it's Lallie. Mark my words, she means mischief, though how or why I can't tell; but I am convinced that she got you to ask her here simply that she might meet Sidney Ballinger—and I wish I'd never seen her."

The Pinnels party went in an omnibus to the Primrose meeting in Fareham. Ballinger secured a seat next Lallie, and under cover of the general conversation demanded:

"Why will you never give me a minute alone? Why do you seem to avoid me so?"

"Why, I'm with you all day long, it seems to me; and as I've nothing to say to you that mightn't be shouted from the housetops, why should solitude be necessary?"

"I have a great deal to say to you that couldn't possibly be shouted. Will you come for a walk to-morrow afternoon? I'm sure *you* don't sleep all Sunday afternoon. Will you promise? And without that chap, Chester, mind—just you and me."

"What about your friend Mrs. Atwood? She may be fond of walking."

"Confound her! Will you promise?"

"I can't promise, but I'll try; there! Only you must be amusing and agreeable."

"I'm only too afraid of being amusing. You generally seem to find me that. I should like you to take me very seriously indeed— I beg your pardon, Mrs. Atwood, what did you say?"

The Primrose meeting was well attended. A noble earl, chief landowner in the neighbourhood, made a speech which mainly con-

sisted of "hems" and "ers" interspersed with platitudes about Empire and Tariff Reform. The Unionist candidate spoke wittily and well, and certain local magnates said the things local magnates usually do say. Then came the lighter part of the evening's business—songs and recitations. Lallie sang her topical ditty with immense *flair*. She looked so small, and slim, and young in her really beautiful French frock, with pearls in her hair and round her slender throat, that the hearts of the audience went out to her before she opened her mouth. But when she did begin to sing, when the big rich voice rolled out the ridiculous words with the marvellously clear articulation that was one great charm in Lallie's singing, she made every point with an archness that was delicious, that seemed to take each member of the audience into her confidence, while that confidence implied entire trust in their general shrewdness and clear-sightedness.

At the triumphant conclusion the whole house rose at her and demanded an encore with such noise and persistency that there was nothing for it but to indulge them.

The organist of Fareham Church presided at the piano as accompanist, and they saw him seemingly protest or expostulate at the song she gave him, but Lallie was evidently peremptory, and it was to be that or nothing. When she came forward to the front of the platform there was a sudden silence as, without any prelude, very softly, every note clear and poignantly sad, there fell upon the astonished ears of that comfortable English company:

"Oh, Paddy, dear, and did you hear the news that's going round?"

Not one word could be missed or misunderstood.

"I met with Napper Tandy, and he tuk me by the hand,
And, says he, 'How's poor old Ireland, and how does she stand?' "

How, indeed? A little uncomfortable doubt as to their dealings with that most distressful country assailed even the most cock-sure politician in that audience.

"Oh, the wearing of the green," sang Lallie, her heart in her voice. The monotonous, mel-

ancholy tone, charged full in every measured cadence with the sorrow of a people, held the good Fareham folk against their wills.

The clever Conservative candidate sat forward in his chair on the platform, his elbow on his knee, his hand shading his keen eyes as he stared fixedly at the little figure who worked this strange miracle.

It was over.

Fareham took a long breath and ventured upon subdued applause. For a moment there was a perceptible and uncomfortable pause. Then Billy Chester leapt to his feet and saved the situation.

"He was glad," he said, "that the lady who had just been delighting them with her great gift of song had reminded them of Ireland and her wrongs. One thing above all others was needed to right those wrongs; to set Ireland in her place among the kingdoms of the Empire; to give her prosperity, self-respect, and peace within her own borders. This remedy they had in their hands if they would only use it—the institution of a judicious system of Tariff Reform. For no part of the Empire would it

do so much as for Ireland." Billy showed how it could be brought about. He quoted statistics by the yard, he made jokes, he put Fareham on good terms with itself again, and the meeting broke up with a special vote of thanks to Miss Clonmell for her delightful music.

"Lallie, you horrid little Fenian, what on earth possessed you to sing that song to-night of all nights?" Mrs. Chester demanded as they drove home.

"It seemed to me," Lallie replied grimly, "that there was an intolerable deal of sack to very little bread throughout the proceedings. So I thought I'd give them a little bread—black bread and bitter, but wholesome."

"But for Billy it might have been very awkward indeed," Mrs. Chester continued.

"Perhaps," Mrs. Atwood suggested, "that natural instinct of the artist to make a sensation at all costs was too strong for Miss Clonmell. She certainly attained her object. The faces of the people were an interesting study."

No one spoke for a moment, but Mrs. Chester, who was sitting next Lallie, suddenly felt for

the girl's hand under the rug and gave it an affectionate squeeze.

"You're a sad pickle," she whispered, "you always were."

"I must speak up for my country when I get the chance," Lallie said aloud. "It isn't often I find myself upon a political platform, but I really believe I could sway the multitude better than most of them. If only I'd danced an Irish jig, I believe I could have got the whole of them to vote for Home Rule."

CHAPTER XX

ON Sunday morning Lallie got a letter from Tony telling her how ill Tarrant was. She read the letter over and over again, feeling restless and unhappy. She wanted Tony. She would have liked to go back to B. House that minute, to comfort him.

"When I was at B. House I was homesick for Bridget, and now I'm here I'm homesick for Tony. Shall I always be homesick, I wonder?" Lallie pondered.

She felt curiously nervous and ill at ease. Sidney Ballinger's inevitable proposal was hanging over her, and she was no nearer any decision as to her own answer. It was all very well "to be nice" to him just to annoy Mrs. Atwood, as it plainly did; but quite another matter to make up her mind "to be nice to him for ever and ever," as she considered would be her duty if she accepted him. She wished she could talk it over with Tony once more.

Mrs. Chester insisted that her husband should take Mrs. Atwood to service at Fareham church while the rest of the party went with her to the church in the village.

Mrs. Atwood protested against the motor being had out on her account, but her hostess was firm; and as she had, when they first met, expressed such an ardent desire to behold that ancient building, she could hardly now declare that she no longer felt any inclination to gaze upon its beauties.

"Won't you come too, Miss Clonmell?" she asked, as arrangements were being made in the hall after breakfast.

"Lallie is coming with me," Mrs. Chester said firmly, without giving her guest a chance to reply. "Every one is coming with me except you and my husband. Then the vicar won't miss him so much."

All through the service Lallie thought of College chapel and longed to be there. From her seat in the gallery she could see Tony, and she liked to look down at him and admire his decorous demeanour. She always regarded his schoolmastering as something quite apart from

himself, and now, although she had been living in B. House for nearly six weeks, she still thought that when he was what she called "stiff" it was only a manner adopted for the benefit of the boys.

Her Tony Bevan was the Tony of the holidays, in shabby Norfolk jacket and old fishing-hat. She never quite got over her first amusement at his sober Sunday garb and college gown. But even in this she liked him. She liked him amazingly. Her eyes were very soft and kind as she pictured Tony, stalwart and grave, leaning back in his college stall. And Ballinger, watching her, wondered what would be her thoughts, and hoped they might be of him.

They all walked back from church together meeting the motor as it turned into the drive. Mrs. Atwood and Mr. Chester got out and the whole party went round the gardens before lunch.

"Remember, we meet in the drawing-room at three—no one's ever there on Sunday afternoon; you promised me a walk, you know—don't forget," Ballinger contrived to say to Lallie as

they neared the house. She nodded without speaking, and Mrs. Atwood who was close behind them—she generally was—heard his reminder and noted Lallie's silent acquiescence.

Her face was very sombre as she slowly went upstairs to take off her hat.

She was leaving next day, and she was no nearer any explanation with Sidney Ballinger than before she came. They had assuredly met once more, but even her vanity hardly helped her to believe that the meeting had, for him, been fraught with any pleasure.

Like Miss Foster, she considered Lallie "a designing girl," and blamed her for Sidney's coldness.

"If I could only see him alone," was the thought that repeated itself over and over again in her head; and the reflection that it was Lallie—and not she—who would see him alone that very afternoon became unbearable. Something must be done.

In winter at Pinnels, bedroom fires are lit before lunch on Sundays, and ladies retire to their rooms immediately after, nominally to

write letters. Most people sleep, but that afternoon Lallie felt unusually wide-awake. She drew up a chair to the fire, intending to read till it should be time for her walk with Ballinger, but the printed page conveyed nothing to her mind. She was in that state of acute nervous tension when definite occupation of any kind seems impossible, and every smallest sound is magnified tenfold.

"I'll get it over," said Lallie to herself. "Nothing will induce me to marry him, but I'll get it over."

Presently there came a very soft rap upon her door. Mrs. Atwood followed the knock and, shutting the door behind her, came over to Lallie.

"May I sit down?" she said. "I very much want to have a few minutes' conversation with you, and this seemed the best opportunity."

She was pale, and there was an atmosphere about her of suppressed storm. Lallie hoisted a mental umbrella while she politely begged her guest to be seated, and awaited developments.

"You have, I think," said Mrs. Atwood, "known Mr. Ballinger for about a year?"

"Just about," said Lallie.

"I have known him for nearly seven."

"Really," Lallie remarked.

"Miss Clonmell, you are young, and I feel that it is only fair to you that you should know —what he and I have been to one another."

"Please, I have no desire to know anything of the kind. It is no business of mine. I would rather not—much rather not—hear any more. Please, please stop before you say things you will wish unsaid half an hour afterwards—please."

"You've got to listen to me whether you like it or not," Mrs. Atwood exclaimed passionately. "You think he is in love with you. I know him; it is merely a passing glamour. Your youth, your music—your—oh, what shall I call it—have carried him off his feet, but it will pass; his heart, what there is of it, belongs to me."

"But you're married, Mrs. Atwood, so what would you be doing with his heart? even if it is as you say."

"*Married!*" Mrs. Atwood repeated bitterly —"married! so I was when he first knew me, but that didn't prevent his falling in love with me."

"I fear," said Lallie gravely, "that he is a very unfortunate young man, and if he has done his best to cure himself of such a hopeless attachment it's not you who should stand in the way of his doing so."

"Confront me with him," Mrs. Atwood cried furiously; "ask him whether what I say is true or not, and you'll soon see."

"My dear Mrs. Atwood, I shouldn't dream of doing such a thing. It is an unpleasant affair altogether, and the sooner it's buried in oblivion the better for all concerned."

"But, girl, I love him! Can't you understand? I love him!"

"I'm very sorry," said Lallie.

"But what are you going to do?" cried Mrs. Atwood, her voice vibrant and shrill with irritation. "The matter can't rest here. What are you going to do?"

"Nothing whatever. I never let it affect me when people tell me tales about others. I

wasn't intended to know this. If Mr. Ballinger wants me to know it, he'll tell me himself."

"You mean that what I have told you won't affect your feelings towards him in any way?"

"Mrs. Atwood, I am really very sorry for you, but I can't see that Sidney Ballinger is called upon to go single all his life just because he was in love with you once and has got over it. He can't marry you if you've got a husband already, and it's much better he shouldn't go hanging round you any more—better for both of you. Don't you see that it is?"

"You don't understand," wailed Mrs. Atwood. "You take the common, narrow, early Victorian view of the whole situation. Does he owe me *nothing* for the years I have loved him?"

"If I had loved a man for years," said Lallie softly, "I don't think I should talk about his debt to me."

"You don't know what you would do. If you were a woman, instead of a child incapable of understanding any great passion, you would know. Will you give him back to me, I ask you? Will you give him back to me?"

"Nothing can do that except his own will."

"But will you stand out of the way, refuse him, have nothing more to do with him? Promise me."

A moment before, Lallie had looked frightened, and Mrs. Atwood thought she could be bullied. She stood over the girl, menace in her eyes and hatred in her heart. She caught Lallie by the shoulder and shook her. She made a great mistake.

A moment before Lallie had been very sorry for her, though she despised her and thought her shameless. But now—she shook off Mrs. Atwood's hand and she, too, stood up.

"I will promise nothing," she said haughtily. "You have no possible right to ask it."

The two women stood looking at each other. Mrs. Atwood breathless, panting, almost beside herself with excitement; Lallie quiet and dignified.

The clock struck three.

"I think we have said all there is to say on this subject," Lallie said coldly. "I really would rather not hear any more."

She crossed the room and held the door open, and in silence Mrs. Atwood passed through it.

Lallie seized her coat and hat, fiercely stabbed in her big pins and ran down stairs to the drawing-room, where she knew Sidney Ballinger would be waiting.

So he was, and Mrs. Atwood was with him. The tears were running down her cheeks. He was white and evidently very angry. His mouth, usually so weak and amiable, had taken on a cruel look—the sort of snarl that curls the lips back from the teeth as in an angry animal.

Lallie stopped short and looked from one to the other.

"I have told her, Sidney," sobbed Mrs. Atwood. "I thought it only right that she should know all we had been to one another—how greatly we loved, how——"

He turned upon her furiously.

"I never loved you. From its first inception the whole thing was false and pretentious, as you are yourself. I was only a boy when you got hold of me. I never really cared for you."

Lallie moved a little nearer Mrs. Atwood.

"Believe me, Lallie," he went on, "I never cared for her, and now she won't leave me alone. I care more for your very shoe-lace——"

"Stop!" It was Lallie who spoke. "How dare you speak to her like that? Oh, you——"

Mrs. Atwood covered her face with her hands and fled from the room.

"Listen to me, Lallie! Don't let her come between us."

He spoke in sobbing gasps and caught at one of Lallie's hands. She drew it away.

"*She* has not come between us," she said scornfully; "it is yourself. You might have told me that it had all been the worst thing possible, and I could have forgiven you. Who am I to judge a man? But not this. You went back on her. You put her to open shame before me. You are a coward, Mr. Ballinger."

"Lallie, think of the provocation! What right had she to come thrusting in with her grievances—wholly imaginary grievances—upon the most beautiful and sacred thing in my whole life. Let us come out and forget her. You will come, won't you? You won't let her spoil everything?"

"I told you before, Mrs. Atwood had no power to spoil anything. I wasn't even sorry for her when *she* told me; but you— No, Mr. Ballinger, I could never trust you. You went back on her."

And Lallie turned and left him standing in the middle of the Pinnels drawing-room, thinking bitter thoughts.

Who could have dreamt she would have taken such a curious line? That she should be shocked, distressed, indignant, was to be expected—it was what he dreaded. But she was none of these things. The affair with Mrs. Atwood seemed to pass her by. She blamed him because he didn't own up, because he was cruel to Eileen Atwood when he denied that he had ever cared for her. He had cared, as much as it was in him to care at all—then. Now, he was absolutely truthful when he had said that Lallie's shoe-string was more to him than Eileen Atwood's whole body. But it had not pleased Lallie. Women were incomprehensible. He knew that Lallie did not love him, but he had believed that he could make her love him in time. She was so affectionate,

so passionately grateful for kindness: surely, surely she must respond some day if only he got his chance.

Had this horrible woman ruined it entirely? He felt that he could gladly have strangled Mrs. Atwood with his own hands: yet his knees bent under him and his pulses were thundering in his ears. He went into the deserted dining-room and mixed himself a stiff whisky-and-soda, and drank it at a draught. He felt better after it and more hopeful.

Poor little Lallie! It had been a horrid scene. He wouldn't appeal to her again—not just now while she was still angry, but in Hamchester—thank Heaven! she would be somewhere within reach where he could see her sometimes. Perhaps by and by, when she had cooled down, she would listen to reason. By the way, he might go and see that schoolmaster fellow who was acting as her guardian. The Chesters said he was a very decent chap, quite a man of the world. Ballinger thought he might just give a hint that there had been unpleasantness about another woman, and a tolerant, broad-minded man—the Chesters said he

was that—would say something sensible to Lallie, and it would have weight. She was forever quoting him. She'd probably take it from him.

It never occurred to Sidney Ballinger that a guardian of any sort could regard him other than in the most favourable light. After all, eight thousand a year is eight thousand a year, and "I'm not a bad chap or wastrel. There's nothing against me really," he reflected.

By tea-time he was able to take quite an optimistic view of the situation.

CHAPTER XXI

NEARLY three weeks later, Tony Bevan sat on a seat in the sun watching "Pots." It was Thursday afternoon and there was an "extra half."

In front of him, standing with legs wide apart, very conscious of a new covert coat and gaiters, stood Punch; a round diminutive Punch all by himself, and overjoyed at his isolation. His family were at least three seats away.

When a covert coat, if it is to be a coat at all, necessarily reaches almost to one's knees, it is difficult to thrust one's hands in knicker-bocker pockets. So Punch found it. He tried both, he tried hard, but the coat would bunch out all round like a frill, so he contented himself with one. With the other he occasionally shaded his eyes, as though the watery November sun was too strong for him.

Sitting on the same seat with "Mitta Bevan," as Punch called him, were two boys—big boys.

Punch liked big boys; they were generally quite friendly.

Presently he turned to Tony and said politely:

"I hope I don't o'scure your view."

The big boys made queer muffled sounds, but Tony said gravely:

"Well, if you *could* stand, just a little to the left—or better still, won't you come and sit with us? You'd see just as well."

Punch came, and was duly ensconced between Tony and one of the boys, with a share of rug over his short legs.

"Where's Lallie?" he asked; "she's not been to see us for ages, nor to sing for me."

"Lallie is coming home the day after tomorrow. Are you glad? *I* am," said Tony, and he looked it.

"Why did she go away so long for?"

"Well, you see, the lady she was staying with begged her to stay on and on, and she's very fond of that lady; but she's really coming home on Saturday."

"Will she come to see me on Saturday?"

"I'm not sure. You see she mightn't get

home very early, but I think she'll come and see you on Sunday afternoon if you'll be at home."

"I'll be at home," said Punch firmly; "I won't go to the children's service with Pris and Prue."

"I don't think she'd come during service time."

"I'd better not go lest she did," Punch insisted. "I like Lallie."

"I think we all like Lallie," said Tony, and one of the "big boys" sitting on the seat murmured: "And so say all of us," and nudged his comrade.

Letter after letter had come from Lallie deferring her return. First it was that—"there are five hundred little red names to sew on Claude Chester's garments before he returns to Egypt. Mrs. Chester seems to imagine that there's something magical about those names, and that they will in some mysterious fashion prevent Claude losing his clothes, which he does at the rate of about an outfit a year. I should think that the whole of the Egyptian Army is taking a wear out of Claude's vests

and things, judging by the amount he takes out and the few and holey garments he brings back. Mrs. Chester says it hurts her eyes to thread needles, and she's a poor old woman with no daughter; and what would I be tearing back to Hamchester for where no one particularly wants me (that's not true, is it?) when I can be of use here? So I really think I'd better stay till the names are all firmly attached, but it won't take long."

Then, after the little red names were all sewed on, Mrs. Chester got an exceedingly bad cold and had to stay in bed; and of course Lallie had to stay on at Pinnels to look after her.

But she was really coming home to-morrow. Tarrant was getting up every day for an hour or two, and it seemed only in keeping with the general pleasantness of things that B. House should already have scored six points to nil.

One thing about Lallie's letter puzzled Tony. She never so much as mentioned Ballinger. If she had given him his *congé*, this was natural enough and like Lallie; but if not, what did it mean?

At half-past five that evening Sidney Ballinger's card was brought in to him.

He never saw people in the drawing-room if he could possibly help it. He never knew why he hated it so till Lallie commented upon its stiffness. He received Sidney Ballinger in his study.

"Nervous, poor chap," was Tony's mental comment, as his guest came in. He did his best to set him at his ease; supplied him with cigarettes; offered him tea; whisky-and-soda; both refused.

"I dare say," said Ballinger, "that Miss Clonmell told you I hoped you would allow me to call. Is she at home?"

Tony looked rather surprised.

"She returns on Saturday; I thought you were at Pinnels also."

"I left last Monday fortnight, and I haven't heard from Miss Clonmell since. I thought she was coming back next day."

"Been having good hunting with the Cockshots?" asked Tony.

"Pretty fair. Mr. Bevan, it's no use beating about the bush; you know, I have no doubt,

why I am here and why I have ventured to call upon you. When I went to Pinnels three weeks ago I fully intended to ask Miss Clonmell to be my wife—to ask her again. She told you that I had already proposed to her?"

"She didn't tell me. Her father did though."

"Well, I didn't ask her again at Pinnels: not in so many words; I never got the chance."

"That was unfortunate," said Tony, and in spite of himself his eyes twinkled.

"It was d—d unfortunate. I'll make a clean breast of it. There was another woman there—a married woman—with whom I had had a foolish flirtation in my salad days—when I was at Cambridge. You know the sort; older than I am, and horribly tenacious."

Ballinger paused. Tony smoked thoughtfully but said nothing to help him out. "A bit of a Goth," thought Ballinger, and took up his tale again.

"Well, she made a scene. Told Lallie all about it, and before me, too; and naturally Lallie—Miss Clonmell—was upset, and she wouldn't listen to me after that."

"But why do you tell me all this?" asked Tony, and took his pipe out of his mouth.

"You see, sir, I know that Miss Clonmell has a very high opinion of you; that you have, in fact, enormous influence over her; and it seemed to me that if you would tell her it really wasn't anything so very bad."

"Wasn't it anything so very bad?"

"I assure you no— Folly if you like, egregious folly; but it might have happened to any one. If you could tell Miss Clonmell that you have seen me, that I have told you the whole thing, and that you think she ought to forgive me—that she ought not to let it ruin both our lives."

"That's the point," said Tony. "Will it ruin Miss Clonmell's life if she continues to take an adverse view of the circumstance you have just related? Or is it only of your own life you are thinking?"

"I believe I could make her happy," said Ballinger gloomily.

"I have no doubt you would do your best to do so, but one can never tell what view a woman may take of such things; and I'm not

sure that they aren't often perfectly right. Still, in Lallie's case, she has had a different bringing up from most girls. You can never depend on her taking the conventional view. There is probably hope for you—*if* she cares."

"A very big if," groaned Ballinger.

"If she doesn't care, I can't see how what you have told me would affect her one way or other." Tony took up his pipe again and stared steadily into the fire.

Ballinger stared at him. How much did he know? Had Lallie written about it to him? She probably would, and that's why he said that about not taking the conventional view. He didn't make it very easy for a fellow. Ballinger cleared his throat.

"May I," he asked, "depend upon you to put my cast as favourably as possible before Miss Clonmell?"

"I can't promise that. You see, to be perfectly candid, I know next to nothing about you, except that you are well off and that Fitz Clonmell likes you; but I will certainly point out to Miss Clonmell that it would be a pity to let an affair of that sort—you said it was en-

tirely ended, I think; had been for some time —stand in the way where there was any solid prospect of happiness. I can't truly say I'm glad you told me of this, for I'm not. It puts a horrid lot of responsibility on me, and an old bachelor is hardly the adviser one would choose for a girl in affairs of this kind."

. . . . .

"I'll put the common-sense view before Lallie, as I promised," Tony wrote to Fitz Clonmell that night; "but your Sidney Bargrave Ballinger is too much of a 'Tomlinson' for my taste."

CHAPTER XXII

"MY heart, my heart is like a singing bird,
Whose nest is in a watered shoot,"

sang Lallie, and Tony Bevan had set his study door open to listen.

There was no doubt whatever that Lallie was supremely glad to be back at B. House. Even Miss Foster had, at dinner that night, thawed into a semblance of geniality; the girl's pleasure was so manifest, her high spirits so infectious.

Now, alone in the drawing-room, she sang song after song, and, unlike Lallie's songs as a rule, not one of them was sad.

"Because my love, my love has come to me,"

she carolled.

The melody—exulting, triumphant, a very pæan of rapture, young, glad, valorous—so entirely expressed Tony's own feeling that it drew him with irresistible force, and he went to her.

She did not pause in her song, but sang on with ever-increasing abandon; and Tony, leaning against the end of the piano and watching her, was hard put to it not to tell her there and then what she was to him.

But he was not given to act on the impulse of the moment, and even before the last glad notes had died away there came the old chilling consciousness of the disparity between them: a disparity not of age only, but of temperament. Tony was very humble-minded. On such rare occasions as he thought about himself at all he did not, like Sidney Ballinger, tell himself he "was not a bad fellow." He was only too conscious of his many defects and shortcomings. He hoped he did his best according to his lights, but he acknowledged that those lights were neither brilliant nor searching. And just as there was for Lallie something incongruous in the fact that he was a schoolmaster, so there was for himself something almost ridiculous in the fact that he, of all people in the world, should be hopelessly in love with one so elusive and so complex as was the lady of his dreams.

For just as no mortal on earth could ever be sure what Lallie would do next, Tony least of all: so she and the world in general had a habit of depending upon Tony Bevan and always expecting from him a certain kind of conduct. Nor were they ever disappointed.

"I wonder," said Lallie, looking across the piano at him, "whether you are half as glad to see me as I am to get back."

"Don't I look glad?"

"You always do that; but then, that might only be kindness and politeness on your part. I seem to have been away years."

"You went for three days and stayed three weeks. Were all the outfit, and colds, and dire need for your presence genuine, or was it merely that you were having a good time and wanted to stay at Pinnels?"

"I did have a good time at Pinnels: I always do; but I should have been back long ago had it not been that Mrs. Chester really seemed to want me."

"Mrs. Chester's desire is not incomprehensible, but I hope you are not going away for

any more long week-ends, or the holidays will be here, and then——"

"Then I pick up Paddy at the Shop dance, and we both go to Ireland for Christmas; and if you think Aunt Emileen will be sufficient chaperon, reinforced by Paddy, we shall be pleased to see you."

"But I'm supposed to be a chaperon myself."

"Not at all," Lallie said emphatically. "Have you forgotten the dreadful fuss you made because Miss Foster wasn't here when I first came?"

"Ah, but that was different—I have to be away so much here. By the way, have you nothing to say to me, in my capacity of chaperon—Uncle Emileen, if you like—as to the momentous decision you told me you would be called upon to make while you were at Pinnels."

"Tony, dear"—Lallie spoke in a whisper, looking delightfully demure and mischievous—"I was never called upon to make any decision at all. I suppose it was conceit on my part to think I should have to do it.

Anyway, I hadn't to, and it saved a lot of trouble."

"Is that quite true, Lallie?"

"In the letter absolutely; in the spirit—well, it takes a lot of explaining when you come to such subtleties. And sometimes one can't explain without bringing in other people who'd perhaps rather be left out."

"Who were the other guests at Pinnels besides you and Mr. Ballinger?"

"A young lady—a young lady after Miss Foster's own heart, I'm sure; so inconspicuous and characterless, she reminded me of the man in the pantomime who is always running across the stage with a parcel and gets knocked down and disappears only to be knocked down next time he crosses the stage with the same inevitable parcel. I'm not sure whether she was the man or the parcel, but she really doesn't come into the story."

"Yes; and who else?"

"Three Chester boys—all nice; there never was a nicer family. And then there was a Mrs. Atwood."

"What was she like?"

"She, Tony, was the kind of person described by their relations as 'highly strung'; she uses immense long words, of Greek origin if possible—at least Billy Chester said so, and he ought to know, being just fresh from Oxford."

"Does Mrs. Chester like your Mr. Ballinger?"

"Why do you call him 'my' Mr. Ballinger? He's nothing of the sort. Yes, Mrs. Chester does like him; she knew him when he was quite young and used to come for the holidays to the uncle who left him all the money, and she was dreadfully sorry for him."

"Who? Ballinger or the uncle?"

"Mr. Ballinger, of course. His parents died when he was quite little, and this uncle and aunt brought him up. There was an aunt then, a dreadful aunt, who thought that everything in the least pleasant was wicked. She considered all games a waste of time. Novels and poetry were an invention of the devil, and such people as the kind, good, merry Chesters 'dangerous companions.' So the poor boy had rather dismal holidays. The only thing she

thought good about Rugby was a volume of Dr. Arnold's sermons. Oh, he had a poor time of it."

"Still, they sent him to a good school and then to the 'Varsity. They didn't do very badly by him."

"The aunt died before he went to Cambridge, and his uncle became much more human. For one thing he was awfully pleased because Mr. Ballinger was so quiet and industrious. *He* didn't waste his time playing cricket and getting blues and things, and *so* he got a splendid degree—a something first! Are you listening, Tony?"

"I am, most attentively, and it strikes me that if that young man had spent a little more of his time playing games, he might not have got into the particular kind of mischief he did get into—mischief that is apt to make things very uncomfortable later on."

All the time she was talking Lallie had been playing very softly in subdued accompaniment to her remarks. Now she suddenly ceased, and sitting up very straight stared hard at Tony, who still lounged against the

other end of the piano devouring her with his eyes.

"What do you mean, Tony?"

"I mean, Lallie, that a young man is apt to pay dearly for a sentimental friendship with a lady of 'highly strung' temperament."

"Where in the world did *you* hear anything about it?"

"Now where do you think?"

"You don't mean to say that he has actually been to see you and told you himself?"

"That is precisely what I do mean; and having heard the story, I feel it my duty to ask you not to be too hard on the fellow—not to let it influence your decision one way or other; especially now that you have told me of his boyhood, would I beg you to judge leniently."

Lallie's little face grew set and hard, her grey eyes darkened, and the soft curves of her chin took on stern, purposeful lines.

"Just tell me this," she said. "Did he, when he described the somewhat stormy interview with Mrs. Atwood, give you to understand that it was his *flirtation* with the

lady that I objected to? Did he say that now?"

"Well, naturally."

"Then he lied."

"Lallie, my dear child!"

"Since *he* has chosen to confide in you—though why, Heaven only knows—I will tell you exactly what happened. She made a scene, and he behaved like a brute to her; and it's because he behaved like a brute that I will have nothing more to do with him. He went *back* on her, Tony; denied that he'd ever cared a toss for her, and before me, too."

"Perhaps there was enormous provocation. You see, he is very much in love with you, and he wouldn't know how you would take it."

"That was evident. He did the one thing that I could never, never forgive. And now let's have an end of this, Tony; you've done your duty and pleaded his cause, and for your comfort I'll first tell you this: that if I had cared for him and there had been twenty Mrs. Atwoods, and each had come with a tale as long as your arm about him, it wouldn't have moved me an inch provided *he* was straight with me

and generous and honest to them. As it happened I didn't care for him. I had decided that before there was any fuss at all with Mrs. Atwood. But when she came and, so to speak, put a pistol at my head, commanding me to give him up, I wasn't going to tell her that I'd done it already."

"But why not, if you had? It would have saved all the fuss."

"If you think I'm going to knuckle under to any idiotic, hysterical woman that chooses to bully me, just to save a fuss, you little know me, or any woman."

Tony shook his head solemnly, but his heart was light, as he said:

"No one can pretend to understand a woman. I have no doubt whatever that you did everything you could to annoy and rouse that poor lady, and then, having achieved your object and forced Ballinger's hand, you turn and rend him for crying out when he's hurt."

"It's only women who may cry out. A man that is a man suffers in silence."

"H'm—I'm not so sure; it depends on the man."

"Well, I'll tell you this: that I *won't* marry any one I can't lean against in a crisis. If I think a man can't bear my light weight without crumpling up, I've no use for him; and the man who goes back on one woman will go back on another. *No*, thank you."

"Will you tell your father this?"

"Oh, dear, yes; and tell him you pleaded Mr. Ballinger's cause and made my life a burden generally. I'll be a sister to him, Tony, and tell him a few home truths; it would do him all the good in the world."

"Well, I sincerely trust no more young men will come to me about you; upon my word, this sort of thing is twenty times worse than parents. You're a frightful responsibility, Lallie."

Her lips trembled, she gave him a long reproachful look, and then seemed to collapse into a pathetic little heap on the keyboard of the piano, her arms spread out on the protesting notes, her head down on her arms.

Lallie was crying, and crying bitterly.

With a muttered and intensely sincere "God help me!" Tony went round and stood beside

her, patting her shoulder awkwardly, but very gently.

"My dear, my dear, what is it? Why do you cry?"

She lifted her little face, all tear-stained and piteous.

"I thought you'd be glad it was all at an end and done with," she sobbed, "but your chief concern seems to be that you'll still have the bother of me. I can't get married just to get out of the way. I've a great mind to accept Cripps and see what you'd say then: *that* would be bother enough——"

"Cripps! What on earth do you mean?"

"Cripps is a gentleman, a dear, nice boy; he wrote to me—it was one of the letters you forwarded, but he'd disguised his writing so you never noticed—saying he thought I'd got into trouble through waving my hand to him, and that was why I'd gone away; and he was dreadfully sorry, and he'd go to you immediately if I gave him leave—he's going to Sandhurst next term if he passes, you know—and that there was nobody in the world—oh, you know the sort of thing——"

"Indeed, I don't," cried Tony, in vigorous disclaimer. "I never heard such nonsense. And what did you do?"

"I wrote him ever such a pretty letter, but I pointed out that the damsel destined for him is probably at this moment wearing a pinafore and a pigtail. I was motherly and kind and judicious."

Lallie's face was still wet with tears, but her eyes sparkled and were full of mischief again.

"I'm glad one of you showed a modicum of sense. Remember, I know nothing of Cripps and his vagaries; don't send him to me, whatever you do."

"*I* didn't send Mr. Ballinger."

"I don't suppose you did; still, if you happen to know of any one else likely to come and ask my assistance in his wooing, you might break it to me gently—now, that I may be prepared."

Lallie looked down; she smiled and dimpled distractingly, as she said softly:

"You must promise not to be cross—Mr. Johns wrote too, very seriously. He asked me to live the higher life with him."

"The deuce he did! And you?"

"I think a sisterly feeling is all I can muster up for Mr. Johns at present."

Tony groaned.

"Will he come to me, do you suppose? I warn you, *he'll* hear some home truths if he does."

"I don't think he'll worry you, Tony. He's on probation—as it were."

Softly, very softly, Lallie began to play the "Widdy Malone," and almost unconsciously Tony found himself humming:

"She broke all the hearts of the swains in thim parts."

Lallie laughed.

"No 'Lucius O'Brian of Clare' has come as yet," she said.

She had turned her face back to Tony, with laughing challenge in her eyes.

"Upon my soul, I can't stand this," cried Tony Bevan, and fled from the room.

Lallie sat where she was, staring after him in speechless astonishment.

"I can't make out Tony these days at all, at all," she sighed.

But she did not get up and run after him as she would have done a month ago.

Tony held old-fashioned and chivalrous notions regarding his duties as host and guardian to his friend's daughter. It seemed to him that in no way was it possible for him to declare his feeling for Lallie without putting her in a false and painful position. And not to declare that feeling emphatically and at length was becoming every day more difficult. He knew the girl to be so fond of him in the dear, natural, unrestrained fashion that had grown with her growth, that had become as much a pleasant habit of mind as her love for Paddy or her father, that he dreaded, should he ask more, lest she might mistake her present feeling for something deeper, and in sheer gratitude and affection promise what it was not really hers to give. Again, should she feel it impossible even to consider him in the light of a lover, he made the situation difficult—nay, impossible—for her. She could not then return to B. House, and she had nowhere else to go.

Sometimes Tony let himself consider a third and glorious contingency—that Lallie cared

even as he cared. Even so, she could not come back to B. House, but old Fitz would have to come back a bit sooner, and she could stay with the Wentworths till he did; at such moments as these Tony's lined face would grow boyishly radiant. But all too soon the good moment passed and stern realities hemmed him in on every side: loyalty to Fitz, the best and kindest thing to Lallie.

Yet, with the temptation to tell her all he felt for her assailing him all day long, it was positive agony to think of her as out of his reach with all the world free to make love to her.

The strain was telling on Tony. He looked old and harassed, and as the Christmas term drew to an end the boys in his form declared that in all their experience his temper had never been so fiendish.

Even Miss Foster noticed that he was looking unwell and, quite rightly, attributed his indisposition to the worry of having "that upsetting girl" in the house.

Mr. Johns was not wholly discouraged by Lallie's sisterly attitude, and in somewhat sol-

emn fashion showed her plainly that he was there, ready to respond to any warmer feeling on her part. Lallie was consistently gracious to him, and the young man's smug acceptance of her favours drove Tony to desperation.

Lallie spent a great deal of her time with the Wentworths. Mr. Ballinger would not take no for an answer. He called frequently, he managed to ingratiate himself with Mrs. Wentworth, and often met Lallie there as Tony knew. He even, with artless belief in Tony's sympathy, sought him again, begging for his good word.

Tony was bitterly conscious that all the world, that all his little circle—boys, masters, and masters' wives—seemed to see more of Lallie than he did, but he never sought her society, and lately she never came to say good-night to him in his study as she always did at first.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE winter term at Hamchester ends the day after the College concert. There is always a great gathering of old Hamchestrians at this function, and the accommodation of the houses is taxed to its utmost. B. House sent more boys to Woolwich than any other in the College, but that year the cadets did not get their leave till three days after the College, and so could not manage to get down for it. Therefore B. House was not quite so packed as usual, though there was a fair sprinkling of old boys who were at the 'Varsity or out in the world.

Lallie sang at the concert, and received a tremendous ovation. She had, herself, set to music four verses of Kipling's—

> "Let us now praise famous men,
> Men of little showing"—

and the tune, stately yet jubilant, marched in swinging measure to a triumphant conclusion.

Not one word in the whole four verses did the audience miss, and the boys yelled "encore" with one prodigious voice.

The programme was a long one, encores were "strictly forbidden," and the restriction was perfectly reasonable; but the boys simply refused to let the next item on the programme begin. Hamchester School had made up its mind that it wanted Lallie to sing again, and no power on earth can stop six hundred boys with good lungs when they fairly get going.

Dr. Wentworth was annoyed; Tony Bevan was furious, for his house had never before really got out of hand, and there was no doubt whatever that it was ringleader in the tremendous din that followed Lallie's singing. Of course she was radiant; this flying in the face of all authority was after her own heart. She was trembling with excitement when at last, in sheer desperation, Dr. Wentworth led her up on to the platform to give the boys their way.

She chose as her song, "Should he upbraid," and sang *at* the Principal in the most barefaced manner. A ripple of mirth ran over the audience, and then, as the liquid, seductive

notes rolled out so smoothly and soothingly, Dr. Wentworth's annoyance subsided and he actually turned and beamed at his boisterous boys. Tony's grim face relaxed, and by the time the song was ended the masters had recovered their good humour and the boys were forgiven.

Next day the school went home, the bulk of the boys by a special train at mid-day. Miss Foster was to leave at tea-time, and Lallie by an afternoon train for Woolwich, where she was to stay with a certain general and his wife, old friends of her father.

Tony Bevan had made no plans. He had half promised to go and shoot with Paddy over in Kerry, but he was not sufficiently sure of himself to make up his mind. He felt slack and tired, old and depressed.

When the last batch of boys had filled the last long string of cabs, Lallie went up to the matron's room. That much-tried woman was sitting exhausted at her table, turning over some of her interminable lists. Lallie sat down opposite to her and laid her hand on the one that held the list.

"You've done enough for one morning," she said. "Rest now for a minute and listen to me. You've been endlessly good to me, Matron, dear, and I don't know how to thank you. I have been so happy here, and now it has all come to an end I feel very sad. I really think B. House is the nicest place on earth, and I'm frightfully sorry to go."

"But you're coming back next term, Miss Clonmell—why, we'll all be together again in no time. There's no need to look so melancholy about it."

Lallie shook her head.

"I'm not at all sure that I'll come back. It seems to me, especially lately, that my being here is rather a worry to Tony. I seem to vex him without meaning to—and I suppose I *am* a bit in the way. It has lately begun to dawn upon me that Miss Foster is perfectly right. You don't want 'stray girls' in a house like this."

The matron looked mysterious, she nodded her head thrice, and there was an "I-could-an'-I-would" air about her extremely provocative of curiosity.

"Why do you look like that, Matron, dear? I won't rest till you tell me. Why do you wag your head so solemnly?"

"Have you no idea, Miss Clonmell, what is the matter with Mr. Bevan?"

"I don't know that there's anything the matter with him except that he's a bit tired of term, and perhaps of me, and having to be Uncle Emileen for such a long stretch of country."

"You're very fond of Mr. Bevan, aren't you, Miss Clonmell?"

"Fond of Tony? I adore Tony! there's nobody like him."

"Has it never occurred to you that perhaps Mr. Bevan——"

Matron paused. She was the soul of discretion, and in view of the daring step she contemplated, she stopped short aghast.

"Perhaps what— What about Tony?"

"Has it never struck you that perhaps Mr. Bevan may be feeling like some of those other young gentlemen who are so much taken up with you—only in his case, being older, it's a much more serious matter."

The lovely colour flooded Lallie's face. Her hand tightened on Matron's, and she gazed at her in breathless silence for a full minute.

"Do you mean," she whispered, "that you think Tony cares for me like that?"

"I am perfectly sure of it," said Matron; "and if *you* are sure you can never care for him 'like that'; I certainly think it would be kinder of you not to come back next term."

Lallie's eyes were shining; she was very pale again as she suddenly leant across the little table and kissed the matron.

Without another word she went out of the room.

She had lunch alone with Tony and Miss Foster. It was a very quiet meal, and when it was over she followed Tony into the study to receive some last instructions about her journey. He was to see her off at the train, and being a methodical person he had made all arrangements for her journey to Ireland as well. He gave her marked time-tables and her tickets, and then looking down at her as she stood small and meek and receptive at his side, he said:

"Ballinger has been at me again, Lallie. He really does seem tremendously in earnest; and I think that if you don't intend to have anything more to do with him you should make it clearer than you have as yet. It would be kinder to put him out of suspense."

"Short of knocking him on the head like a gamekeeper with a rabbit, I don't see what more I can do."

"Perhaps if he had it in black and white he'd realise that you mean what you say."

"But I can't write to him if he doesn't write to me. It's you he bothers, not me. He has never said one syllable to me that all the world mightn't hear, since I came back from the Chesters. You can't expect me to go out of my way to refuse a man who has never asked me. 'He either fears his fate too much'——"

"Perhaps he's pretty certain he'd 'lose it all' poor chap," said Tony gently; "I can sympathise with him."

Lallie made no answer.

He took her to the station, bought her papers, spoke to the guard, and compassed her

about with all the thousand-and-one observances that men love to lavish on women for whom they care.

As the train began to move, Lallie leant out of the window.

"If you look," she began, then crimsoned to the roots of her hair, and the train bore her from his sight.

"If you look—" Tony repeated over and over again as he walked slowly home—what could she have been going to say?

He went into the town and restlessly did several quite unnecessary errands at various shops. It was tea-time when he got back, and he had it with Miss Foster in the drawing-room. When she had gone he went into his study and sat down at his desk.

On his blotting-pad lay a volume of Shakespeare. It was not one of his own little leather edition that he always used, but a fat, calf-bound book from the set in the drawing-room.

He lifted it and saw that it contained one of Lallie's markers—a piece of white ribbon with a green four-leaved shamrock embroidered at

each end. He opened it at the place marked, and there was a faint pencil line against the following passage:

> "O, by your leave, I pray you;
> I bade you never speak again of him:
> But, would you undertake another suit,
> I had rather hear you to solicit that,
> Than music from the spheres."

The College Shakespeare Society had read *Twelfth Night* at B. House only a fortnight before, and Lallie had pestered Tony to let her read Viola, but only boys and masters were permitted to perform.

Tony laid the book down on his desk and put the marker in his breast pocket. He looked at his watch and wrote a telegram to an old Hamchestrian who was one of the Under Officers at the Shop.

"If you possibly can, get me a ticket for the dance to-night. Can't get there till eleven; leave it with sergeant at door."

He rang furiously for Ford and told her to pack his bag. He was unexpectedly called away.

He caught the six-fifteen, which reached Paddington soon after nine, drove to a hotel,

dressed, dined, and went down by train to Woolwich.

The porters marvelled at his lavish tips, and the cabman who drove him from the Arsenal station to the Shop came to the conclusion that the gentleman was undoubtedly drunk when he surveyed his fare.

His ticket awaited him, on production of his visiting card, and he was allowed to make his way to the gym., where the ball was held.

As he surveyed the brilliant scene his heart failed him for the first time that night. There were not half a dozen black coats in the crowded room, and just for a moment Tony again felt old and plain and uninteresting. He was far too big, however, to remain unnoticeable. One after another of his old boys found him and gave him astonished but hearty greeting.

At last he caught sight of Lallie. She was waltzing with Paddy—conspicuously handsome Paddy; and even at that ball, where good dancing is the rule and not the exception, there was something harmoniously distinguished in the dancing of these two.

Lallie looked white and tired. Presently

Paddy felt her sway in his arms. "Stop!" she cried breathlessly; "am I mad, or is that Tony standing on the other side of the room?"

Paddy piloted her skilfully over to Tony. One glance at their faces was enough for that astute youth.

"How ripping of you to come!" he exclaimed; "but Lallie's a mean little minx not to tell me you were coming."

"She didn't know. I didn't know myself five hours ago. But I have something very important to say to Lallie—something that couldn't possibly wait."

Paddy chuckled.

"You may have the rest of this dance," he said; "and you may trust Lallie for knowing the best places for sitting out."

"Will you come?" asked Tony.

"To the end of the world," said Lallie, as she slipped her hand under his arm; "but I warn you, Tony, dear, with me you won't have altogether a tranquil journey."

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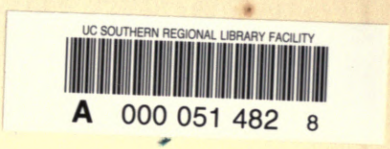
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